APRIL 1960 35 C

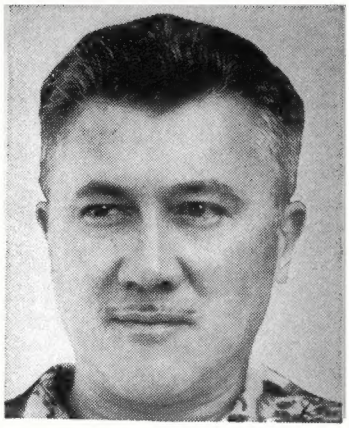
# THE saint®

## MYSTERY MAGAZINE

edited by
LESLIE
CHARTERIS

## THE SAINT & THE BLIND SPOT

ALL NEW
Stories by
GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT
HAYDEN HOWARD
RANJEE SHAHANI
WYATT BLASSINGAME
FRANKLIN GREGORY



I saw it observed recently by one of those syndicated pundits who are hired by the newspapers to tell the common readers what to think, that every man needs to have some bee in his bonnet if he is going to make anything Buzz.

The word "pundit", I need hardly remind the erudite audience of this Magazine, is of Indian origin; and by coincidence or otherwise the most valuable man to me on our staff, Hans Stefan Santesson, who is modestly billed under me as "Editor", is also a nut on India, and probably has more important Indian and Pakistani friends than anyone this far from the Ganges. I can recall that he responded with a rather vague silence on one occasion when I sent him a portion of an epic poem I had written,—*My esteem for Nehru*

*is practically zehru*

Although I am thus left only guessing as to Pandit Santesson's orientation in Indian-Pakistani politics, I do know that he treated me with enough impartiality on my last visit to New York to buy me a most excellent dinner at a caravanserai called the Kashmir, as to whose allegiance I am not informed, but where I understand he has also eaten with Ranjee Shahani, a contributor of ours who is back in this issue with a story called GHOSTS, which has been highly praised by E. M. Forster and others.

This might not call for any special comment except that he also recommended the inclusion this month of THE EDUCATED THIEF, another Indian-background story by Franklin Gregory—who, he assures me, has also *been there.*

In defense of this apparent overloading on the Indian side, I can only remind you that we also have such all-Americana as an unusual baseball story by George Fielding Eliot, a Wild Western by Hayden Howard, a Florida outdoors yarn by Wyatt Blassingame, and an old London bit by your humble servant, who reminds you that India was very much in the news as we went to press, with Communist Chinese probing the frontier and Eisenhower wondering which club would slice over the Taj Mahal. I figure you have to let such a good Editor go overboard sometimes.

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THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 13, No. 4. Published monthly by Great American Publications, Inc., 270 Madison Avenue, New York 16, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $4.00, single copies 35c, Foreign postage extra. Second class postage paid at New York, N. Y. and at additional Mailing Offices. Characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious and have no relation to any persons living or dead. © 1960, by Great American Publications, Inc. Printed in U. S. A.

# THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

## *You Can* Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY it some time. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

### Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas?* That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

### This *Free* Book Points Out the Way

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. *They will show you how* to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. Send for a copy of the fascinating sealed *free* book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs. Address your request to: Scribe: M.P.Z.

## *The* Rosicrucians

(AMORC)

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

# Give Me One Evening And I'll Give You A Push-Button Memory

**Yes! Here at last is your chance to gain the *super-powered, file-cabinet memory you've always dreamed about*... so easily and so quickly that you'll be astounded ...AND ACTUALLY DO IT WITHOUT RISKING A PENNY!**

Let me explain! I don't care how poor you may *think* your memory is now! I believe that you have a memory 10 TO 20 TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN YOU REALIZE TODAY! I believe that your memory is working at a tiny fraction of its true power today—*because you simply don't know the right way to feed it facts!* Because you don't know the right way to take names and faces and anything else you want to remember—*and burn them into your memory so vividly that you can never forget them!*

Yes! Remembering is a trick! Powerful memories can be made to order—you don't have to be born with them! The secret of a super-powered, hair-trigger memory is as simple as tying your shoelace! I can teach it to you in a single evening! *And I'm willing to prove it to you without your risking a penny!* Here's how!

## Would You Invest Three Hours of Your Time to Transform Your Memory?

All I ask from you is this. Let me send you—at my risk—one of the most fascinating books you have ever read. When this book arrives, set aside only one evening. Give this book your uninterrupted attention. *And then get ready for one of the most thrilling accomplishments of your entire life!*

Take this book and turn to page 39. Read eight short pages—no more! And then, put down the book. Review in your own mind the one simple secret I've shown you. *And then—get ready to test your new, AUTOMATIC memory!*

What you are going to do, in that very first evening, is this! without referring to the book, you are going to sit down, and you are going to write—not five, not ten, but TWENTY important facts that you have never been able to memorize before! If you are a business man, they may be customers' orders that you have received... If you are a salesman, they may be twenty different products in your line... if you are a student, they may be the twenty parts of your homework... if you are a housewife, they may be important appointments that you have to keep tomorrow!

In any case, you are simply going to glance over that list again for a few moments. *You are going to perform a simple mental trick on each one of these facts—that will burn that fact into your mind, permanently and automatically!* And then you are going to put that list away. You're going to bed without thinking of it again.

*And the next morning, you are going to amaze your family and friends!* When you go down to business, you'll attend to every one of those orders—*automatically*—without referring to your memo pad! For perhaps the first time in your life, you'll be able to *plan ahead your entire day*—automatically, in your own mind—without being a slave to reminders, or notes, or other 'paper crutches!"

Yes! And you'll amaze your friends by remembering every product in your line—backwards and forwards—in the exact order that you memorized them! You'll keep every single appointment on time—*because one appointment will automatically flash into your mind after another—at the precise moment you need them—exactly as though you pushed a mental button!*

All this—in a single evening! Here is a gift that will pay you dividends for as long as you live! *A simple trick... a simple secret of burning facts into your memory that may change your entire life!*

## Suddenly, Whole New Worlds of Self-Confidence Open Up for You!

But this is just the beginning of the "miracles" you can perform with your memory! This secret is just one of the over 50 MEMORY INTENSIFIERS contained in this book! You have seen men and women use these exact same methods on television to astound you! *But you never knew how incredibly simple they were—once you learned the inside secret!*

For instance—REMEMBERING NAMES AND FACES! How many times have you been embarrassed, because you couldn't remember the name of the person you were talking to... or introduce him to a friend! *In as little as one short week after you receive this book,* how would you like to walk into a room full of TWENTY new people... meet each one of them only once... *and then remember the names—automatically—for as long as you live!*

Yes! These names and faces are filed in the storehouse of your memory—permanently! Whenever you meet these people on the street... whenever you bump into them at the club... whenever they drop in unexpectedly at a friend's house—*the instant you see their face, their name pops into your mind automatically!* There is no hesitation, no embarrassment! *By the time you can reach out to shake their hands, your memory has delivered all the important facts you need to please them!*

Think of the advantage in business—when you can call every customer by his first name—and then ask for his wife and children, instantly, by *their* names! Think of the impression you'll make when you ask him about the state of his business, about his hobbies, when you even repeat—almost word for word—the last conversation you had with him! Think of becoming a celebrity at your club—as the member who "knows everyone"... who can be depended upon to avoid mistakes, to win new friends for the organization, to get things done!

But this is still just the beginning! This book teaches you to *remember exactly what you hear and read!* It gives you the confidence you need to make an important point at a business conference... to back up your opinion in discussions... become a *leader* in conversation, with dozens of interesting facts at your fingertips!

This book teaches you how to memorize a speech, or a sales presentation—in minutes! It teaches you how to remember every card played when you relax at night! It can improve your gin, or poker, or bridge game by

**MEET HARRY LORAYNE** "The human being with the most phenomenal memory in the world!" Harry Lorayne has lectured in front of thousands of Americans! Rotarians, Elks, Masons, Chamber of Commerce groups have all called on this amazing man to prove the business and social power of a strong, reliable memory! Lorayne's memory is so strong that he can remember the names, faces, addresses and occupations of over 700 different people in a single evening—after meeting each one of them only once!

And yet, a few short years ago, this man's memory was no better than yours! This man trained his own memory—he built the most fabulous memory in the world from scratch! And now he gives you the very same secrets he discovered and perfected himself! Memory Builders that work overnight! Secrets that can change your entire life in a single week—OR EVERY CENT OF YOUR MONEY BACK!

Read the thrilling details on this page! Try them—ENTIRELY AT OUR RISK!

100% in a single week!

This book shows you how to improve the depth and force and power of your mind! It shows you how to double your vocabulary . . . learn dozens of ways to burn new words into your memory . . . learn their meanings without looking them up . . . repeat entire phrases, sentences, paragraphs from the great writers! You'll be able to learn a foreign language almost overnight – at least three to four times as quickly and easily as you could without this system! You'll be able to hear a joke, story or anecdote only once, and then repeat it in the same hilarious way!

Yes! And most important of all, this book will show you how to *professionally organize your mind* – do what you have to do in *half* the time! You'll remember dates, addresses, appointments—automatically! You'll carry dozens of telephone numbers in the file-cabinet of your mind! You'll stop going back over work two or three times because you'd forgotten something! *Let me send you this book – and prove these facts in one short evening – OR IT DOESN'T COST YOU A PENNY!*

## Try It Entirely at My Risk!

The name of this book is HOW TO DEVELOP A SUPER-POWER MEMORY! I believe that this book is revolutionary – because it proves, once and for all, that memory improvement *can* be fun . . . it *can* be exciting . . . it *can* be passed from one person to another—automatically!

This book is a word-for-word copy of my regular mail-order course, which I sell for $25. However, the book costs you only $2.98! *And I want you to try this book – in your own home – entirely at my risk!* Here's how!

First, try for yourself the experiment I have described in this article! *See for yourself the almost-unbelievable results in the very first evening alone!* And then, continue to use the book for an additional week! In this very first week alone, if this amazing book doesn't do everything I say . . . if it doesn't give you a file-cabinet memory – no matter what your age – no matter how poor you may think your memory is today – *then simply return the book for every cent of your money back!*

You have nothing to lose! Act TODAY!

## EVEN THE EXPERTS CHEER!

**From the top newspapers in America! Enthusiastic raves of Harry Lorayne's new automatic memory improver! Read what top, hardboiled critics say about this man — and his wonderful method.**

**Robert Coleman, New York Mirror, . . . . . a swell party . . . The stellar entertainer was Harry Lorayne, billed as "The man who has the most phenomenal memory in the world." After watching Harry at work, we were inclined to agree with that statement!**

**Ruth Ruzzie, WNNT, Virginia . . . this book is fascinating reading . . . Harry Lorayne states this emphatically . . . THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A POOR MEMORY . . . ONLY A TRAINED OR UNTRAINED MEMORY. He shows in this fascinating book how to easily train your own memory to retain facts . . . figures . . . places . . . people and whatever you wish to remember . . . how to quickly memorize speeches or facts that you wish to remember for future use . . . I found HOW TO DEVELOP A SUPER-POWER MEMORY an experience in reading.**

**Ed Galing, Pennsylvania Intelligencer, . . . . . Have you ever wished you had a better memory? That you could remember names, places, things? Well, Sir, a new book just out is guaranteed to improve your memory and you will be able to amaze your friends with your feats of memory . . . "HOW TO DEVELOP A SUPER-POWER MEMORY," by Harry Lorayne. The author can call more than 700 persons by their first name after meeting them for the first time . . . The book contains the secret on how to be a good rememberer . . . If you're having trouble remembering a phone number or an anniversary give this book a try. It could make you happy, successful, rich.**

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Gentlemen: Yes, I want to try a copy of Harry Lorayne's amazing new book HOW TO DEVELOP A SUPER-POWER MEMORY – entirely at your risk. I will pay postman only $2.98 plus low C.O.D. charges. I will use this book for a full ten days at your risk. If I am not completely delighted . . . if this book does not do everything you say, I will simply return it for every cent of my money back.

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# The Saint and The Blind Spot

## by LESLIE CHARTERIS

It is rather trite to remark that the greatest and sublimest characters always have concealed in them somewhere a speck of human jelly that wobbles furtively behind the imposing armour-plate, as if Nature's sense of proportion refused to tolerate such a thing as a perfect superman. Achilles had his heel. The hard-boiled hoodlum weeps openly to the strains of a syncopated Mammy song. The learned judge gravely inquires: "What is a gooseberry?" The Cabinet Minister prances pontifically about the badminton court. The professor of theology knows the Saint Saga as well as the Epistle to the Ephesians. These things are familiar to every student of the popular newspapers.

But to Simon Templar they were more than mere curious facts, to be ranked with "Believe-it-or-not" strips or popular articles describing the architectural principles of the igloo. They were the very practical psychology of his profession.

"Every man on earth has at least one blind spot somewhere," Simon used to say, "and once you've found that spot you've got him. There's always some simple little thing that'll undermine his resistance, or some simple little trick that he's never heard of. A high-class card-sharper might never persuade him

From: THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER Copyright © 1933 by Leslie Charteris

to play bridge for more than a penny a hundred, and yet a three-card man at a race track might take a fiver off him in five minutes. Develop that into a complete technique, and you can live in luxury without running any risks of getting brain fever."

One of Simon Templar's minor weaknesses was an insatiable curiosity. He met Patricia at Charing Cross underground station one afternoon with a small brown bottle.

"A man at the Irving Statue sold me this for a shilling," he said.

The broad reach of pavement around the Irving Statue, at the junction of Green Street and Charing Cross Road, is one of the greatest open-air theatres in London. Every day, at lunch-time, idle crowds gather there in circles around the performers on the day's bill, who carry on their work simultaneously like a three-ring circus. There is the Anti-Socialist tub-thumper, the numerologist, the strong man, the Indian selling outfits to enable you to do the three-card trick in your own home, the handcuff escape king, the patent medicine salesman, every kind of huckster and street showman takes up his pitch there on one day or another and holds his audience spellbound until the time comes for passing the hat. Simon rarely passed there without pausing to inspect the day's offerings, but this was the first occasion on which he had been a buyer.

His bottle appeared to contain a colourless fluid like water, with a slight sediment of brownish particles.

"What is it?" asked Patricia.

"Chromium plating for the home," he said. "The greatest invention of the century—according to the salesman. Claimed to be the same outfit sold by mail-order firms for three bob. He was demonstrating it on a brass shell-case and old brass door-knobs and what not, and it looked swell. Here, I'll show you."

He fished a penny out of his pocket, uncorked the bottle, and poured a drop of the liquid on to the coin. The tarnished copper cleared and silvered itself under her eyes, and when he rubbed it with his handkerchief it took a silvery polish like stainless steel.

"Boy, that's marvellous!" breathed Patricia dreamily. "You know that military sort of coat of mine, the one with the brass buttons? We were wanting to get them chromed——"

The Saint sighed.

"And that," he said, "is approximately what the cave woman thought of first when her battle-

scarred Man dragged home a vanquished leopard. My darling, when will you realise that we are first and foremost a business organisation?"

But at that moment he had no clear idea of the profitable purposes to which his purchase might be put. The Saint had an instinct and a collecting passion for facts and gadgets that "might come in useful," but at the times when he acquired them he could rarely have told you what use they were ever likely to be.

He corked the bottle and put it away in his pocket. The train they were waiting for was signalled, and the rumble of its approach could be felt underfoot. Down in the blackness of the tunnel its lights swept round a bend and drove towards the platform; and it was quite by chance that the Saint's wandering glance flickered over the shabbily-dressed elderly man who waited a yard away on his left, and fixed on him with a sudden razor-edged intentness that was more intuitive than logical. Or perhaps the elderly man's agitation was too transparent to be ordinary, his eyes too strained and haggard to be reassuring. . . . Simon didn't know.

The leading draught of the train fanned on his face, and then the elderly man clenched his fists and jumped. A woman screamed.

"You blithering idiot!" snapped the Saint, and jumped also.

His feet touched down neatly inside the track. By some brilliant fluke the shabby man's blind leap had missed the live rail, and he was simply cowering where he had landed with one arm covering his eyes. The train was hardly more than a yard away when the Saint picked him up and heaved him back on to the platform, flinging himself off the line in the opposite direction as he did so. The train whisked so close to him that it brushed his sleeve, and squeaked to a standstill with hissing brakes.

The Saint slid back the nearest door on his side, swung himself up from the track, and stepped through the coach to the platform. A small crowd had gathered around the object of his somewhat sensational rescue, and Simon shouldered a path through them unceremoniously. He knew that one of the many sublimely intelligent laws of England ordains that any person who attempts to take his own life shall, if he survives, be prosecuted and at the discretion of the Law imprisoned, in order that he may be helped to see that life is after all a very jolly business and thoroughly worth living; and such a flagrant case as the one that Simon had just witnessed seemed to call for some

distinctly prompt initiative.

"How d'you feel, chum?" asked the Saint, dropping on one knee beside the man.

"I saw him do it," babbled a fat woman smugly. "With me own eyes I saw it. Jumped in front of the train as deliberate as you please. I saw him."

"I'm afraid you're mistaken, madam," said the Saint quietly. "This gentleman is a friend of mine. He's subject to rather bad fits, and one of them must have taken him just as the train was coming in. He was standing rather close to the edge of the platform, and he simply fell over."

"A very plucky effort of yours, sir, getting him out of the way," opined a white-whiskered military type. "Very plucky, by Gad!"

Simon Templar, however, was not looking for bouquets. The shabby man was sitting motionlessly with his head in his hands: the desperation that had driven him into that spasmodic leap had left him, and he was trembling silently on a helpless reaction. Simon slipped an arm around him and lifted him to his feet; and as he did so the guard broke through the crowd.

"I shall 'ave to make a report of this business, sir," he said.

"Lord—I'm not going to be anybody's hero!" said the Saint. "My name's Abraham Lincoln, and this is my uncle, Mr. Christopher Columbus. You can take it or leave it."

"But if the gentleman's going to make any claim against the company I shall 'ave to make a report, sir," pleaded the guard plaintively.

"There'll be no complaints except for wasting time, Ebenezer," said the Saint. "Let's go."

He helped his unresisting salvage into a compartment, and the crowd broke up. The District Railway resumed its day's work; and Simon Templar lighted a cigarette and glanced whimsically at Patricia.

"What d'you think we've picked up this time, old dear?" he murmured.

The girl's hand touched his arm, and she smiled.

"When you went after him I was wondering what I'd lost," she said.

The Saint's quick smile answered her; and he returned to a scrutiny of his acquisition. The shabby man was recovering himself slowly, and Simon thought it best to leave him to himself for a while. By the time they had reached Mark Lane Station he seemed to have become comparatively normal, and Simon stood up and jerked a thumb.

"C'mon, uncle. This is as far as I go."

The shabby man shook his head weakly.

"Really, I don't—"

"Step out," said the Saint.

The man obeyed listlessly; and Simon took his arm and piloted him towards the exit. They turned into a convenient café and found a deserted corner.

"I took a bit of trouble to pull you out of a mess, uncle, and the story of your life is the least you can give me in return."

"Are you a reporter?" asked the other wearily.

"I have a conscience," said the Saint. "What's your name, and what do you do?"

"Inwood. I'm a chemist and—a sort of inventor." The shabby man gazed apathetically at the cup of coffee which had been set before him. "I ought to thank you for saving my life, I suppose, but—"

"Take it as a gift," said the Saint breezily. "I was only thinking of our rails. I've got a few shares in the company, and your method of suicide makes such a mess. Now tell me why you did it."

Inwood looked up.

"Are you going to offer me charity?"

"I never do that. My charity begins at home, and stays on with Mother like a good girl."

"I suppose you've got some sort of right to an answer," said Inwood tiredly. "I'm a failure, that's all."

"And aren't we all?" said the Saint. "What did you fail at, uncle?"

"Inventing. I gave up a good job ten years ago to try and make a fortune on my own, and I've been living from hand to mouth ever since. My wife had a small income of her own, and I lived on that. I did one or two small things, but I didn't make much out of them. I suppose I'm not such a genius as I thought I was, but I believed in myself then. A month or so ago, when we were right at the end of our tether, I did make a little discovery."

The shabby man took from his pocket a small brass tube like a girl's lipstick case, and tossed it across the table. Simon removed the cap, and saw something like a crayon—it was white outside, with a pink core.

"Write something—with your pen, I mean," said Inwood.

Simon took out his fountain pen and scribbled a couple of words on the back of the menu. Inwood blew on it till it dried, and handed it back.

"Now rub it over with that crayon."

Simon did so, and the writing disappeared. It vanished quite smoothly and easily, at a couple of

touches, without any hard rubbing, and the paper was left without a trace of discoloration or roughness.

"Just a useful thing for banks and offices," said Inwood. "There's nothing else like it. An ink eraser tears up the paper. You can buy a chemical bleacher, and several firms use it, but that's liquid—two reagents in separate bottles, and you have to put on drops of first one and then the other. That thing of mine is twice as simple and three times quicker."

Simon nodded.

"You're not likely to make a million out of it, but it ought to have quite a reasonable sale."

"I know that," said Inwood bitterly. "I didn't want a million. I'd have been glad to get a thousand. I've told you—I'm not such a genius as I thought I was. But a thousand pounds would have put us on our feet again—given me a chance to open a little shop or find a steady job or something. But I'm not going to get a penny out of it. It isn't my property—and I invented it! . . . We've been living on capital as well as income. This would have put us straight. It had to be protected."

The old man's faded eyes blinked at the Saint pitifully. "I don't know anything about things like that. I saw a patent agent's advertisement in a cheap paper, and I took it to him. I gave him all my formulae—everything. That was a fortnight ago. He told me he'd have to make a search of the records before my patent could be taken out. I had a letter from him this morning, and he said that a similar specification had been filed three days ago."

The Saint said nothing; but his blue eyes were suddenly very clear and hard.

"You see what it was?" In his weakness the shabby inventor was almost sobbing. "He swindled me. He gave my specifications to a friend of his and let him file them in his own name. I couldn't believe it. I went to the Patent Office myself this morning: a fellow I found there helped me to find what I wanted. Every figure in the specification was mine. It *was* my specification. The coincidence couldn't possibly have been so exact, even if somebody else had been working on the same idea at the same time as I was. But I can't prove anything. I haven't a shilling to fight him with. D'you hear? He's ruined me—"

"Steady on, uncle," said the Saint gently. "Have you seen this bird again?"

"I'd just left his office when—when you saw me at Charing Cross," said Inwood shakily. "He threw me out. When he found he

couldn't bluff me he didn't bother to deny anything. Told me to go on and prove it, and be careful I didn't give him a chance to sue me for libel. There weren't any witnesses. He could say anything he liked—"

"Will you tell me his name?"

"Parnock."

"Thanks." Simon made a note on the back of an envelope. "Now will you do something else for me?"

"What is it?"

"Promise not to do anything drastic before Tuesday. I'm going away for the weekend, but Parnock won't be able to do anything very villainous either. I may be able to do something for you—I have quite a way with me," said the Saint bashfully.

This was on a Friday—a date that Simon Templar had never been superstitious about. He was on his way to Burnham for a weekend's bumping about in a ten-ton yawl, and the fact that Mr. Inwood's misadventure had made him miss his train was a small fee for the introduction to Mr. Parnock. He caught a later train with plenty of time to spare; but before he left the elderly chemist he obtained an address and telephone number.

He had another surprise the next morning, for he was searching for a certain penny to convince his incredulous host and owner of the yawl about a statement he had made at the breakfast table, and he couldn't find it.

"You must have spent it," said Patricia.

"I know I haven't," said the Saint. "I paid our fares yesterday afternoon out of a pound note; and I bought a magazine for a bob—I didn't spend any pennies."

"What about those drinks at the pub last night?" said the host and owner, who was Monty Hayward.

"We had one round each, at two-and-a-tanner a time. changed a ten-bob note for my whack."

Monty shrugged.

"I expect you put it in a slot machine to look at rude pictures," he said.

Simon found his bottle and silvered another penny for demonstration purposes. It was left on a shelf in the saloon, and Simon thought no more about it until the following morning. He was looking for a box of matches after breakfast when he came across it; and the sight of it made him scratch his head, for there was not a trace of silver on it.

"Is anyone being funny?" he demanded; and after he had explained himself there was a chorus of denial.

"Well, that's damned odd," said the Saint.

He plated a third penny on the spot, and put it away in his pocket with a piece of paper wraped round it. He took it out at six o'clock that evening, and the plating had disappeared.

"Would you mind putting me ashore at Southend, Monty?" he said. "I've got some business I must do in London."

He saw Inwood that night; and after the chemist had sniffed at the bottle and tested its remarkable properties he told the Saint certain things which had been omitted from the syllabus of Simon Templar's variegated education. Simon paced the shabby inventor's shabby lodging for nearly an hour afterwards, and went back to his own in a spirit of definite optimism.

At eleven o'clock the next morning he presented himself at Mr. Parnock's office in the Strand. The inscription on the frosted-glass panel of the door informed him that Mr. Parnock's baptismal name was Augustus, and an inspection of Mr. Parnock himself showed that there had been at least one parent with a commendable prescience in the matter of names. Mr. Parnock was so august a personage that it was impossible to think of anyone abbreviating him to "Gus." He was a large and very smooth man, with a smooth convex face and smooth clothes and smooth hair and a smooth voice—except for the voice, he reminded Simon of a well-groomed seal.

"Well, Mr.—er—"

"Smith," said the Saint—he was wearing a brown tweed coat and creaseless grey flannel trousers, and he looked agitated. "Mr. Parnock—I saw your advertisement in the *Inventor's Weekly*—is it true that you help inventors?"

"I'm always ready to give any assistance I can, Mr. Smith," said Mr. Parnock smoothly. "Won't you sit down?"

The Saint sat down.

"It's like this, Mr. Parnock. I've invented a method of chromium plating in one process—you probably know that at present they have to nickel plate first. And my method's about fifty per cent cheaper than anything they've discovered up to the present. It's done by simple immersion, according to a special formula." The Saint ruffled his hair nervously. "I know you'll think it's just another of these crazy schemes that you must be turning down every day, but—Look here, will this convince you?"

He produced a letter and handed it across the desk. It bore the heading of one of the largest motor-car

manufacturers in the country, and it was signed with the name of the managing director. Mr. Parnock was not to know that among Simon Templar's most valued possessions were a portfolio containing samples of notepaper and envelopes from every important firm in the kingdom, surreptitiously acquired at considerable trouble and expense, and an autograph album in which could be found the signatures of nearly every Captain of Industry in Europe. The letter regretted that Mr. Smith did not consider five thousand pounds a suitable offer for the rights of his invention, and invited him to lunch with the writer on the following Friday in the hope of coming to an agreement.

"You seem to be a very fortunate young man," said Mr. Parnock enviously, returning the document. "I take it that the firm has already tested your discovery?"

"It doesn't need any tests," said the Saint. "I'll show it to you now."

He produced his little brown bottle, and borrowed Mr. Parnock's brass ashtray for the experiment. Before Mr. Parnock's eyes it was silvered all over in a few seconds.

"This bottle of stuff cost about a penny," said the Saint; and Mr. Parnock was amazed.

"I don't wonder you refused five thousand for it, Mr. Smith," he said, as smoothly as he could. "Now, if you had come to me in the first place and allowed me to act as your agent—"

"I want you to do even more than that."

Mr. Parnock's eyebrows moved smoothly upwards for about an eighth of an inch.

"Between ourselves," said the Saint bluntly, "I'm in the hell of a mess."

The faintest gleam of expression flitted across Mr. Parnock's smooth and fish-like eyes, and gave way to a gaze of expectant sympathy.

"Anything you wanted to tell me, Mr. Smith, would of course be treated confidentially."

"I've been gambling—living beyond my means—doing all sorts of silly things. You can see for yourself that I'm pretty young. I suppose I ought to have known better. . . . I've stopped all that now, but—two months ago I tried to get out of the mess. I gave a dud cheque. I tried to stay in hiding—I was working on this invention, and I knew I'd be able to pay everyone when I'd got it finished. But they found me last Friday. They've been pretty decent, in a way. They gave me till Wednesday noon to find the money Otherwise—"

The Saint's voice broke, and he averted his face despairingly.

Mr. Parnock gazed down at the silvered ashtray, then at the letter which was still spread open on his blotter, and rubbed his smooth chin thoughtfully. He cleared his throat.

"Come, come!" he said paternally. "It isn't as bad as all that. With an asset like this invention of yours, you should have nothing to worry about."

"I told them all about it. They were just polite. Wednesday noon or nothing, and hard cash—no promises. I suppose they're right. But it's all so wrong! It's unjust!"

Simon stood up and shook his fists frantically at the ceiling; and Mr. Parnock coughed.

"Perhaps I could help," he suggested.

The Saint shook his head.

"That's what I came to see you about. It was just a desperate idea. I haven't got any friends who'd listen to me—I owe them all too much money. But now I've told you all about it, it all sounds so feeble and unconvincing. I wonder you don't send for the police right away."

He shrugged, and picked up his hat. Mr. Parnock, a cumbersome man, moved rather hastily to take it away from him and pat him soothingly on the shoulder.

"My dear old chap, you mustn't say things like that. Now let's see what we can do for you. Sit down." He pressed the Saint back towards his chair. "Sit down, sit down. We can soon put this right. What's the value of this cheque?"

"A thousand pounds," said the Sains listlessly. "But it might as well be a million for all the chance I've got of finding the money."

"Fortunately that's an exaggeration," said Mr. Parnock cheerfully. "Now this invention of yours—have you patented it?"

Simon snorted harshly.

"What with? I haven't had a shilling to call my own for weeks. I had to offer it to those people just as it stood, and trust them to give me a square deal."

Mr. Parnock chuckled with great affability. He opened a drawer and took out his cheque-book.

"A thousand pounds, Mr. Smith? And I expect you could do with a bit over for your expenses. Say twenty pounds. . . . One thousand and twenty pounds." He inscribed the figures with a flourish. "I'll leave the cheque open so that you can go to the bank and cash it at once. That'll take a load off your mind, won't it?"

"But how do you know you'll ever see it back, Mr. Parnock?"

Mr. Parnock appeared to ponder the point, but the appearance was illusory.

"Well, suppose you left me a

copy of your formula? That'd be good enough security for me. Of course, I expect you'll let me act as your agent, so I'm not really running any risk. But just as a formality. . . ."

The Saint reached for a piece of paper.

"Do you know anything about chemistry?"

"Nothing at all," confessed Mr. Parnock. "But I have a friend who understands these things."

Simon wrote on the paper and passed it over. Mr. Parnock studied it wisely, as he would have studied a Greek text.

$$Cu + Hg + HNO_3 + St = CuHgNO_3 + H_2O + NO_2$$

"Aha!" said Mr. Parnock intelligently. He folded the paper and stowed it away in his pocket-book, and stood up with his smooth fruity chuckle. "Well, Mr. Smith, you run along now and attend to your business, and come and have lunch with me on Thursday and let's see what we can do about your invention."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am to you, Mr. Parnock," said the Saint almost tearfully as he shook the patent agent's smooth fat hand; but for once he was speaking nothing but the truth.

He went down to see Inwood again later that afternoon. He had one thousand pounds with him, in crisp new Bank of England notes; and the shabby old chemist's gratitude was worth all the trouble. Inwood swallowed several times, and blinked at the money dazedly.

"I couldn't possibly take it," he said.

"Of course you could, uncle," said the Saint. "And you will. It's only a fair price for your invention. Just do one thing for me in return."

"I'd do anything you asked me to," said the inventor.

"Then never forget," said Simon deliberately, "that I was with you the whole of this morning—from half-past ten till one o'clock. That might be rather important." Simon lighted a cigarette and stretched himself luxuriously in his chair. "And when you've got that thoroughly settled into your memory, let us try to imagine what Augustus Parnock is doing right now."

It was at that precise moment, as a matter of history, that Mr. Augustus Parnock and his friend who understood those things were staring at a brass ashtray on which no vestige of plating was visible.

"What's the joke, Gus?" demanded Mr. Parnock's friend at length.

"I tell you it isn't a joke!" yelped Mr. Parnock. "That ashtray was perfectly plated all over when I put it in my pocket at lunchtime. The fel-

low gave me his formula and everything. Look—here it is!"

The friend who understood those things studied the scrap of paper, and dabbed a stained forefinger on the various items.

"*Cu* is copper," he said. "*Hg* is mercury and $HNO_3$ is nitric acid. What it means is that you dissolve a little mercury in some weak nitric acid; and when you put it on copper the nitric acid eats a little of the copper, and the mercury forms an amalgam. $CuHgNO_3$ is the amalgam —it'd have a silvery look which might make you think the thing had been plated. The other constituents resolve themselves into $H_2O$, which is water, and $NO_2$, which is a gas. Of course, the nitric acid goes on eating, and after a time it destroys the amalgam and the thing looks like copper again. That's all there is to it."

"But what about the St?" asked Mr. Parnock querulously.

His friend shrugged.

"I can't make that out at all—it isn't any chemical symbol," he said; but it dawned on Mr. Parnock later.

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## AN EDITORIAL ASIDE

This month's contributors—in the variety of their interests and backgrounds—confirm what I have said so many times that you cannot generalize about the quality of writing in this *genre*, and that you can neither say that the result is pure escape reading *nor* that the result is material of a socio-documentary nature. It is more than that. I of course feel that much of the writing in this field does have this documentary quality,—that, in years to come, researchers will turn to the writings of many people in this field in order to get some idea of how we all thought and lived and loved and hated in these decades.

*Is* this nonsense?

To say so is to ignore the fact that the success of many of these novels *has* been due to their faithful reportage of the moods and mores of our times, whether it was a matter of reporting the doings in the 87th Precinct *or* of etching, with the quiet delicate literacy of a Dorothy Salisbury Davis, thoughts and urges and desires in allegedly more peaceful parts . . . .

This is why I say that Harlan Ellison, who returns here with a grimmer story than his previous contributions, and who may be known to some of you who also read *Fantastic Universe*, our companion magazine, for his often sensitive portraits of the day after tomorrow, *does* belong in the same issue with George Fielding Eliot, the distinguished military analyst, also an occasional contributor to these pages.

With this in mind I take special pride in bringing you a very unusual novelet by Dr. Ranjee Shahani, author of THE AMAZING ENGLISH, THE INDIAN WAY, etc., and formerly with the International Commission in Indo-China, presently in this country gathering material for a book about the United States. Edward Garnett, who read the story in manuscript, said of it that it had "the magic spell of Turgenev", while E. M. Forster admitted that he had fallen in love with the author's heroine. Perhaps you will agree with Edward Thompson—and with the undersigned—that the almost incapturable atmosphere of the desert, and of India, has been captured with rare art. . . .

H.S.S.

# FINGER IN THE TROUGH

## HAYDEN HOWARD

Squealing straight from their angry bellies, the hogs stampeded back and forth along the split-rail fence. They couldn't break through to the trough. Their slobbering snouts rammed between the rails at the approaching deputy's legs, and he shied away. He guessed they'd gobble most anything, even a man.

"I sent for the Marshal!" Old Man Rokus yelped at him, stabbing the pitchfork into the trough of garbage he'd been sorting.

"Marshal's got more important things to do," the gangling young deputy retorted.

Suddenly, surprisingly, the old man's beard shook in gap-toothed laughter. "For once you're right, sonny boy! Dyin' *is* important.—Maybe it's my good luck sent *you* instead of him. Maybe *you're* our next town marshal?"

"Don't bet on that," the deputy blurted angrily, his gaze shifting from the trough to the fly-seething wagon the old man used on his morning rounds of the saloon back doors and hotel trash heaps.

"Just tell Billy Cuyler you'll hang somebody, anybody," Old Man Rokus taunted," and that young Billy will back you for our next town marshal."

The young deputy kicked the trough, his face twisting with uncer-

tainty and pain. "The Marshal and me can handle the likes of Billy Cuyler—and your two big-mouthed boys throwed in."

"Ain't my boys no more," Old Man Rokus squealed like a horse with raw saddle sores. "They don't claim me, so I don't claim them!—I bet your saddle-tramp Marshal don't even step out on the street, when Billy decides to come out of the O.K. Hotel."

The deputy glared down into the confusion of wilted lettuce leaves, steak gristle, damp newspapers, stained letters and unbrandable slop.

"Where is it?" he demanded finally. "—What you told the stage driver you found—."

"Shoveled it under so's the ravens wouldn't fly it off." The old man's pitchfork uprooted a mass of garbage. "It spooked me. Wouldn't touch it, not me. Might poison my good luck."

Wrinkling his nose, the deputy poked at a burnt mass of pinto beans trailing a black net stocking.

"Found me a diamond ring last week," the old man yelled more cheerfully above the squealing of the hogs. "Shows—my luck's changed for the good. One of them O.K. girls is wearing the ring now, —Suzy, you know, with the swole veins in her legs. Guess you wouldn't. I never told her it come from their own slops."

His pitchfork tore out a mass of papers. "Looks like some drunk's took up letter writing—on letter paper with the O.K. brand."

While papers scattered thick as cottonwood leaves, the young deputy's hands, still rope-burned from cowboying, scraped aside even more unfinished letters. He didn't pay much mind that they all began alike. He wasn't looking for letters.

But they all began: *To Who It May Consern.* The wavering ink-scrawl tripped, blotted and tried again on another paper. On one sheet it got as far as: I, William Lee Cuyler, do leave my paw's—my my my—house and land and cattle and all that I own——.

"Looks like Billy's not feeling so quick-triggered as he talks," Old Man Rokus wheezed over the deputy's shoulder. "That there's the start of a will. Billy was a nice young feller before his paw was bushwhacked—and my two no-good boys leeched on to Billy."

"Last night," the deputy muttered unhappily, "the *three* of 'em was upstairs in Billy's room at the O.K., hollering and cussing and drinking. Your two boys was primin' Billy to come out——."

Folks had stayed off the street, waiting like gawky young punchers

at another feller's wedding. In the general store, the only man to bet even-money for the Marshal was a drummer, a liniment salesman, who'd just got off the stage. He bet ten cents. But the Marshal never even came out of his office. And Billy Cuyler hadn't come out of the O.K. Hotel.

"Billy Cuyler! That unlicked calf writes a will," Old Man Rokus cried out in anger. "Sixty-one years old and I got nothing to will. Not like Billy. His paw left him all that land and a new ranchhouse and haystacks and silos and water rights and a bank account and more land than my land."

"If it wasn't for the one day of the Big Norther," the old man howled, "I'd of been like Mr. Cuyler.—My boys blame me. My two boys was little tads gawkin' at my steers all drifted over with snow, stiff-tailed and dead. I can still hear Fats sayin': Paw, Mr. Cuyler's cows is bedded down right-smart and warm in the willows'."

Old Man Rokus spat in the trough. "Wasn't many years before they was working as fence-menders for Cuyler."

Pulling away more papers, the deputy noticed they were stuck together with dried blood.

"They blame me," Old Man Rokus yelped at the endless sweep of prairie sky," for the Norther. They blame me because I didn't *own* no river willows to shelter my steers that day. They cuss me—for not bein' *lucky* like Old Man Cuyler."

The deputy flinched as if he'd uncovered a snake. It lay there, slightly curved at the knuckle, dead white.

"Don't touch it," Old Man Rokus squawked.

The deputy picked it up in a fold of paper.

"Whose finger might it be?" the old man wheezed in fascination.

The deputy swabbed his sleeve across his brow. His gaze avoided the ravenous eyes of the hogs; his gaze rode along the tortured wagon ruts and on away from town.

Beyond the fading wagon tracks, beyond the dusty river, the blue-hazed cattle spread had flung a rope of smoke into the sky. He guessed a Mexican was burning tumbleweeds on the Cuyler Ranch. Ant-small beneath the bowl of sky, a horseman was raising dust toward town.

"When Billy Cuyler comes out of the O.K. Hotel," the old man rasped, "if you're not too busy ducking his lead, ask him where's the rest of this poor feller?"

"Billy wouldn't do nothing like this," the deputy protested and turned his back and clumped toward town.

"Then ask my two boys," Old

Man Rokus yelled after him. "Those two jokers have done things I ain't told about.—Tell 'em that! And tell 'em I'm a better paw than Cuyler was, six months better."

"Six months since Billy's paw been shoveled under," the old man shouted triumphantly.

"Ehen they pin the—badge on you," taunted the voice of Old Man Rokus on the rising wind, "tell Billy you'll hang somebody—anybody—for bushwhacking his paw. Don't matter who——."

Puffs of dust ballooned ahead of the deputy's boots along the waiting street. Livery stable, general store, faces peering out like prairie dogs, unpainted saloon, painted saloon, and looming up three stories high, its windows ablaze with morning sun, the garish red and yellow of the O.K. Hotel——.

Across the street squatted the jail.

The Marshal's face showed behind the iron-barred window. "Where you been?"

The deputy entered the dim office. "You sent me down to the hog corral."

The Marshal didn't reply.—All over his desk lay envelopes. For months he'd been writing to law officers as far away as Bozeman, Montana, describing Mr. Cuyler's Sunday saddle and boots, but there was no trace of the bushwhacker, the body-robber.—The Marshal kept staring out at the O.K. Hotel, its sun-blazing staircase.

"Maybe we should bust in after Billy?" The deputy found himself whispering. "He's probably sleeping off last night's drunk."

The Marshal blinked his hopeless eyes. "We'd ketch him. But what for? Belle wouldn't make no complaint against him, her Billy-boy. Anyways, jailin' Billy would only put it off. It's Billy who's got to decide what he's going to do——."

His huge hand white-knuckled, the Marshal clutched the bars. "I can't get no rest. Billy's paw was too friendly to me. I can't wait too long. I'm likely to ride out of this town."

"Truly, you done your best to find the bushwhacker, Marshall."

"That's not what the Rokus boys been telling Billy. You and me, we're strangers here. Fats and Raw Rokus, they went to the schoolhouse with Billy."

"You done your best, Marshal.—It was some saddle-bum passin' through who bushwhacked Mr. Cuyler. Those fellers are gone like Injuns. Only a saddle-bum on the prod would risk making off with Mr. Cuyler's white-blaze mare and Sunday saddle, and even Mr. Cuyler's Stetson and Sunday boots.

With the river in flood, it wouldn't be no rider from these parts who'd try crossing *above* the willows—and drown the mare in a thicket."

"Maybe he didn't cross. He took off the saddle. Then maybe he drowned the mare a-purpose." The Marshal peered at the rack of empty rifles.

"I feel blind," the Marshal muttered, "like a blind steer that can't even smell grass.—Mr. Cuyler treated me better than you can say for the folks in this town. Before I crossed the river, he put me up, grub at his table, sheets on the spring bed. 'Wait over a day,' he says in the morning. 'Come riding. Come antelope hunting with me.' And Billy, his pride, played a sweet harmonica by the fire."

The deputy squinted up at the O.K. Hotel. A window had been smashed out last night, but Belle wouldn't make no complaint against Billy. She'd write down two windows, or maybe four, on the Cuyler bill.

Somewhere a horse nickered, and the deputy looked down at the Marshal's clumsy hands, laying out the envelope, the paper for another hopeful letter describing the silver on Mr. Cuyler's Sunday saddle. Once Mr. Cuyler had come riding in, after the Marshal's old cutting horse had developed the heaves, and he made the Marshal a present of a good horse, the gelding out of his own white-blaze mare.

"Marshal," the deputy blurted, "this here's the finger."

The Marshal blinked. "I can see it ain't no toe." Then he glanced out the window, along the street toward the livery stable, as though he were expecting somebody from that direction.

"Marshal, like Old Man Rokus sent word, this finger was in the garbage from the O.K. Hotel.—Where do you think's the rest of this poor feller?"

The Marshal didn't show much interest. "I hope the rest is leaning against the O.K. bar, soaking its stump in a shot glass and cussing the day it signed on as a cowboy."

"Don't look like no roping accident to me," the deputy answered. "Carving job's as neat as the vet at gelding time."

"Throw it away.—The boy at the livery stable says Dutch Henry sent word he's found another boot. Coyotes dug it out of a dry wash. He's riding in for supplies, and he's bringin' it."

The deputy glanced at the box of old boots in the corner, not a Sunday boot in the lot. He frowned at the Marshal's huge awkward hand clutching the pen.—Actually the Marshal was just another cowpoke

who'd got lonesome and heavy in the saddle. The Marshal was just an over-sized waddie who'd got tired of breathing trail dust last summer and come into a town to try his hand at wrestling drunks.

The deputy had seen him walk right up to a gun barrel and, talking softly, pull it out of the drunk's hand. The Marshal seemed sort of slow. He'd never seen the Marshal draw, except maybe at rocks or trees.

Something clanked. Together they whirled.

The Marshal smiled unhappily. "I did a little business while you was gone. Fats Rokus come crawlin' down the steps of the O.K. He was so drunk he couldn't find his way through the horses' legs at the hitching rail."

The Marshal stared out at the O.K. Hotel again. "When that fat drunk checker-cheater made out who I was, he started laughing and thanking me. For what? I bulldogged him into a cell for Drunk and Disorderly on a Public Street. That leaves his brother, Raw, and—Billy."

"Can't Billy understand you done your best! It was some saddle-bum gone like dust in the wind."

"Maybe. Maybe not. But I admit with Billy it's peculiar: why should a saddle-bum make off with Mr. Cuyler's lucky piece? It wasn't gold. Wasn't silver. It was just tin—on a string—stamped: GOOD LUCK."

They listened to the obscenely befuddled cussing and laughing from Fat's cell. The Marshal's huge hand wiped slowly up and down his leg.

"Now there's this finger," the deputy blurted. "One time in Dodge, I seen two fellers fresh off the trail so drunk they was betting fingers. Started with a hatchet and ten—."

"Shut up!" the Marshal yelled. "Throw that finger away. One thing is all I can think about."

"But Marshal, I've—."

"Shut up! Someone's hollering my name." The Marshal collided with a chair and ran into the street, and the deputy slowly followed, pocketing the finger.

"Witness? What do you mean, a witness?" the Marshal's voice bellowed.

Suzy was sagging out an upstairs window of the O.K. Hotel. "I *said*—is it *all right* to be a witness?"

"A witness to what?"

"How should I know. I just wrote my name. Raw told me I was a witness.—It was those two Rokus boys and Billy."

The Marshal shrugged and started back to his office.

"Wait, Marshal, I'm telling you a complaint. Raw held me and Fats stabbed me!"

The Marshal stopped.

'Stabbed me with the pen," Suzy squawled. "Tried to tattoo me—the drunken bum."

The Marshal started walking again.

The deputy cupped his hands. "Suzy, anyone get their finger cut off up there?"

Suzy squeaked, then squealed with laughter as arms enclosed her from behind, dragging her from the window.

Glaring out of town, the deputy made out the horse and rider now dusting across the dry river; from the Cuyler Ranch the smoke rose black.

There was an awful yell inside the O.K. Hotel, a thumping of boots on the inside stairs.

"Marshal," the deputy exclaimed, "the liniment salesman, that drummer, he put up at the O.K. He was wearing a real-for-sure diamond ring. Maybe this is his finger! Maybe the Rokus boys killed him and cut off his finger to get the ring."

Inside, doors slammed. Chairs smashed. There was a blood-curdling yell, and the front door of the O.K. Hotel flew open. Widening his stance, the deputy poised his hand above his holster.

The drummer, half out of his checkered suit and clutching his carpet bag, came flying out into the street, propelled by Raw Rokus. As far as the deputy could tell, the departing drummer had all of his fingers.

"Lookee that man run!" Raw Rokus whooped and started across the street friendly-like.

Raw wasn't wearing his gun. The deputy glanced at the Marshal. The Marshal just stood there. The sun-gleaming round face of Raw Rokus grew larger. Menfolks called him "Raw" ever since the Fourth of July drink-down shoot-up when he wallowed in the water trough and scared decent women away from their windows.

"Howdy there, Marshal!" Raw Rokus flapped a meaty hand and smiled swollenly with his lips.

He winked at the deputy and spat a bloody gob of spittle too near his boot. "No drummer did thith to me."

He peeled up his lip, revealing a bloody gap. "Billy kickth my tooth tho looth latht night, I pulled it out with my own fingerth."

His thick fingers were stained blue with ink.

The Marshal didn't say anything, and the deputy turned his back and stared out at the shape of the rider spurring up from the dried-out river toward the hog ranch.

"Listen, Marshal," Raw Rokus laughed, "that Billy's a real danger.

Screamin' about gunnin' folks. You ought to take his guns away when he's in town. Me and Fats are skeered of him now! He'll kill anybody.—So drunk last night, he said he'd never give you time to draw. Right in the back, he said. Kept rollin' right off his bed. Lyin' there, cussin' you, got the fool idea maybe you bushwhacked his paw. He don't hold his liquor."

Raw Rokus spat in the dust. "Fats passed out first, though. Where—is—Fats?"

The Marshal jerked a thumb toward the jail.

Raw Rokus spread his lips. "Real brave, Marshal, now maybe you're ready to handle Bill?—Real brave, rasslin' my brother into a cell. You're lucky I took away Fats' derringer, or maybe you'd be lyin' in the dust?"

"Look out!" Raw yelled, whirling toward the O.K. Hotel.

The deputy leaped aside, slapping leather. The Marshal crouched, his heavy revolver waving back and forth uncertainly as he studied the upstairs windows of the O.K. Hotel.

Raw Rokus doubled up with laughter. "Marshal, Marshal, I forgot to tell you. Billy ain't here. He got sick in the night and fell down the stairs. I heard him ride out."

The Marshal crouched there, his jaw muscles shivering. His knees straightened, and slowly he put his gun away.

"Marshal, Marshal," Raw Rokus went on, "I heard Billy mutterin' he's going to shoot up this town when he comes in. It's your job to pertect the citizens. I'll stand with you. Fats will, too."

The Marshal blinked at him.

Raw nodded soberly. "Your job is to ride out to the Cuyler Ranch and talk to Billy. Tell him we don't want no trouble. Ask him to unbuckle his gun belt. You should ride out there and talk to him while he's sober instead of drunk and mean."

"You change sides mighty quick," the deputy blurted.

Like a crafty poker player, which he was, Raw flicked his eyes from the deputy to the Marshal. But the Marshal had turned, head straining forward, peering down the street.

A shivering yell broke ahead of the hoofbeats as the rider spurred in past the hog corral. The deputy glimpsed the long glint of a carbine barrel as the galloping blur of the horse and its black shadow swept along the dusty street—straight at them.

Raw Rokus let out a gurgling sound. The deputy leaped away from the Marshal, bumping shoulders with Raw, who was headed in the same direction as the carbine

boomed. Slapping leather, the deputy tripped as the second shot whined too close. The third kicked up dust between Raw's boots. Raw was running directly ahead of him, and the deputy abruptly realized the Marshal was not the target. The horseman was cutting loose at Raw Rokus.

Dropping in the dust, rolling, the deputy saw nothing but dust-caked horse looming above,—and rising hooves.

The horse sunfished over on its side so hard the deputy heard its ribs snap as the horse's breath came out with a whoosh and dust bloomed up around it. The Marshal must have shot the horse.

Masked in dust, the hatless man scrabbled on his hands and knees a dozen feet beyond his fallen horse. His distorted face had hit the street first.

The deputy sprang up and backward, stepping on—the man's hat. He saw the open-levered carbine lying against the wall of the jail. To his surprise, the Marshal slid his revolver into its holster.

"Billy——," the Marshal began softly.

The dust-cloaked figure wavered upward with a coughing stagger. It retched. "Kill yuh, kill yuh all ——."

"Billy, I'm sorry.—Maybe I'm a sorry excuse for a town marshal. But I admired your paw, and I'm sorry."

The dusty figure's elbows rose like a grasshopper cocking itself to hop. "Keep back!"

"I'll see about hauling your horse off the street," the Marshal's gentle voice went on. "Why don't you go into the O.K. and——wash up."

"Keep back! They *said* you'd talk soft and easy for a chance to grab me and get my gun."

"I'm not crowding you, Billy."

"I'm going to put one in your guts."

"Folks still hold some respect for you, Billy. You haven't done no real harm yet."

"Harm? My paw's dead. My paw's dead, and nothing's been done about it. Keep Back! If I have to, I'll kill everybody in this stinkin' town."

"They're mostly your friends, your paw's friends, Billy."

"Where was they at the funeral?"

"It was cloudbursting, Billy. The river was still rising."

"Where was you—you saddle-bum!"

"I was riding in the rain, trying to pick up trail of who bushwhacked your paw."

"And you was paid not to ketch him. The Rokus boys got proof of that——. Those two hog-fat laughin', thievin' drunks! I've burned my

paw's ranchhouse. That'll make 'em squeal. I've been slaughterin' his stock and that's just——."

Billy's hand slapped leather, springing out a dazzle of steel, outspeeding the Marshal's heavy gun in a flash of steel that seemed to spring free ——far out, with Billy's body and hand lunging; he'd juggled his revolver.

The explosion was from the Marshal's gun.

As Billy's body sagged forward, his awkward hand fumbled away the revolver and lost it in the air, and he fell in the dust.

"Lord help me," the Marshal bleated, dropping to his knees beside the writhing body.

As they rolled Billy over on his back, he opened his mouth, but the whistling sound came from his chest. His mutilated hand pawed the air. He was trying to tell them——. His mutilated hand—.

"Your finger, Billy," the Marshal cried out. "It was your trigger finger they cut off. They fixed it so I'd murder you."

"Kill yuh, kill yuh all," Billy's voice creaked. "You killed my paw!"

"No Billy," the Marshal pleaded, while the townspeople flooded around with a shaking of heads; for the Cuyler's, father and son, had been the town's best customers.

"Hold Billy down," the Doc said waspishly. "He's bleeding inside."

"Don't *you* touch me," Billy hissed at the Marshal.

His big hands opening and clenching, the Marshal just stood there. Finally the bullet hole was stoppered with rag, and Billy was laboriously lifted. The Marshal just stood there on the dusty street. On the Marshal's shadow stood the deputy, watching them carry Billy into the Doc's office.

"Marshal," the deputy blurted, "last night while those two Rokus boys was jollyin' Billy with drink, primin' him to draw on you, they must of got him to write his will. In the hog garbage I saw wills he was too drunk to finish. I guess he was so drunk he willed his paw's ranch to *them*. Then those fat leeches got him so *dead* drunk — they cut off his trigger finger. Cut it off so'd you'd win the gunfight.—If you won't take 'em, I'll do it!"

The Marshal's huge gun hand was wiping up and down his Levi's as if to clean itself. "He—didn't even have—a trigger finger. If Billy dies ——. If he—dies——."

"If we find the will," the deputy said bitterly, "we might prove *something* against those two."

The Marshal just stood there in the dust.

And the deputy persisted: "Re-

member, Raw was right now saying you should ride out to the Cuyler Ranch, where he knowed Billy went. He knowed Billy'd draw on you. Raw knowed *he* couldn't hardly kill Billy and then collect on Billy's will. Listen, listen, Marshal, Raw fixed it so's *you'd* do his murderin'."

Slowly the Marshal turned. Amazingly, Raw Rokus was still there. He was leaning against the jailhouse wall. Strangely, as if unconscious of the Marshal's approach, he was staring down his shirt front. Hurriedly, his fingers were searching through his shirt pockets. Papers fluttered around his boots. His barlow knife lay in the dust beyond his Bull Durham sack. Desperately, Raw searched his empty pockets.

"You murderin' liar!" the Marshal yelled.

With a gap-toothed grimace, Raw glanced up. "I ain't carryin' no gun, Marshal——."

His nervous fingers fumbled in his pockets again. Abruptly, his boots slid out and he sat down hard in the dust.

"Get up!" The Marshal's boot nudged him uncertainly.

Raw toppled on his side, and the deputy gasped in horror as the flies buzzed up from a fist-sized crater where Billy's carbine bullet had errupted from Raw's back.

"Marshal, I'll run for the Doc," the deputy gasped.

"No, I ain't hurt bad," Raw's voice rose thinnly. "Going to stand up as soon's I get my breath. Soon's I find the paper, going to ride out to *my* ranch. —Where's the paper? Fats has got it. I want my brother——."

The deputy plunged through the dark jail office into the rattling, yelling cell corridor.

"About time," Fats Rokus squealed, his drink-reddened eyes bulging from his bloated face. "Ain't no water in this cell. I'm dyin'. What kind of jail is this where citizens is thirsted to death?"

The deputy unlocked the cell door, and Fats pushed past him into the corridor and siezed the pitcher.

Gurgling, he drank directly from the pitcher, water streaming past his little ears.

"Your brother's been shot through with a rifle bullet."

Fats kept drinking. Lowering the pitcher, he dragged his palm across his mouth and retreated into his cell, with the pitcher.

"Billy Cuyler's shot your brother."

Fats sat down on his bunk. "I was skeered it might turn out that way."

"Your brother's dyin'. Come on!"

Fats glanced up nervously at the

barred window. "Where's Billy?"

"Come on! There isn't much time."

"I ain't movin'.—Where's Billy now?"

"In the Doc's office. I expect he's dead or—."

"Let's go!" Fats squealed with relief, upsetting the water pitcher as he struggled to his feet, and waddled out of the jail.

Arms akimbo, he stood over his brother. "You look shot through, Raw. Better let me carry the paper before some of these folks go thievin' through your pockets."

"I ain't hurt," Raw breathed faintly. "I'm fixin' to stand up."

Laboriously, Fats got down on his hands and knees in the dust beside him. "Which pocket did you button the paper in last night? I was pretty drunk."

"The paper——," Raw wheezed, "I must of give it to you. Where's the paper?"

"I never had the paper," Fats squealed in horror. "Last night you wouldn't give it to me. You wouldn't let me hold it."

Fats stared at the papers drifting on the dust. He scrambled after them, snatching them up, letting them flutter away.

With a squeak of realization, Fats lumbered across the street with mounting speed.

"Stop!" the Marshal bellowed impotently.

They listened to Fats' boots pounding up the inside staircases of the O.K. Hotel. Girls screamed in there. Doors slammed. Bureau drawers opened and closed. Fats' face appeared at an upstair window. "Raw, she's swept out the room. All gone. Gone."

They heard him pounding down the stairs. He emerged on the street clutching a paper sack.

"You hid it. You must of hid it after I passed out," he screamed, charging at Raw. "Where is it you lying fool?"

He tried to sidestep the Marshal. "Out of my way. I'll buy and sell marshals before I'm through."

One of the Marshal's hands bear-trapped the front of Fats' shirt. The other beckoned to the deputy. "Show him Billy's finger."

"Don't know nothing about fingers," Fats puffed.

The Marshal's free hand drew his revolver almost free of its holster.

"I don't know nothing about that finger," Fats wheezed. "I had nothing to do with that. —I'm only looking for a paper, a legal paper."

Shoving Fats away, the Marshal levelled his revolver. Fats retreated, clutching the weighted paper sack with both hands, and the dep-

uty guessed what was in it: Fat's two-barrelled derringer.

A nervous squirm crossed Fat's lips. "I don't expect lopping off a finger is so much of a crime around here. Raw done that. Billy never even felt it. I was layin' there so drunk, I couldn't even crawl. I couldn't stop Raw. You ask Suzy. Raw done it. He's the one carries a barlow knife. It's layin' over there. You ask Raw whose knife it is."

"Raw's dead," the deputy answered.

"Marshal—," a shout echoed accusingly along the street; it was the Doc's voice. "Billy Cuyler's dead."

The Marshal simply stared down at the dust. Strangely, he returned his revolver to its holster. Raising his tortured eyes, he stared through Fats.

"If I was you," whispered the Marshal's sick voice. "You—slobber through the trash from the O.K. Hotel! In your paw's hog corral, that's where Billy's finger was found. Look there for what *you* want."

Edging away, Fats squeaked uncertainly: "You won't shoot—not in the back, Marshal?"

"I'm through shootin',——anybody."

"Marshal!" the deputy exploded. "You ain't just going to let him go?"

"He's got no place to go—no more than I have."

"What are you talking about, Marshal?—See, he's headed for the hog corral. He'll look for the paper, the will.—I'm goin' after him!"

"Wait." The Marshal's fingers closed around the deputy's arm. "He don't make no difference. It don't make no difference."

"Marshal?" The deputy couldn't understand this.

"I've got to buy a drink." The Marshal turned the deputy toward the O.K. Hotel. "—a drink—I know too much now———a drink."

"Marshal?" The deputy blinked at the Marshal's strange face.

When the girls saw the Marshal's expression, they left the parlour. Her account books open and forgotten, Belle didn't come over. She sat at her table, chin on her fists, staring at the Marshal. Billy Cuyler had been her pet.

The Marshal laid a silver dollar on the bar. But the bartender, a stove-in old cowboy, went on polishing glasses. He glanced nervously across at Belle.

The Marshal didn't notice; his red-rimmed eyes searched the young deputy's face. "I got something to say, *important* to everybody, *all* of us."

His huge hand laid down his town marshal's star on the bar. "I

always knowed this— there must be a line or two about it in the Bible —but I couldn't *see* it in this country, like with a little hurting pebble in your boot. Out here most men make out they don't even *feel* it, but it wears 'em away—what I'm warning you about. I see it now. I see—"

Far off, there was the weak pop of a derringer, and the deputy's head snapped up. He pushed back from the bar.

"Wait." The Marshal reached for him, but the deputy backed off.

"I got to go down there," the deputy gasped uneasily.

"But what I want you to understand, it's about killin', it don't—. Wait boy." The Marshal implored with his open hand.

"Take this then," the Marshal sighed, and his other hand slid the silver-plated badge along the bar, "—but it ain't enough——."

The deputy fled into the street, the prairie sunlight dazzling his eyes, the five hard points of the metal star paining his hand. He thrust it into his pocket.

Against the dusty wind he ran toward the hog ranch. The sound of the hogs was squealing fury. The second barrel of the derringer sent a weak pop through the furious squealing of the hogs. The wind carried Fat's shrill cursing, suddenly shriller yelling.

Shreds of paper, ripped papers, chomped letters blew toward the deputy in the wind-driven dust.

The sound of screaming muffled and stopped. All that was visible was the backs of the pulling, chomping hogs.

One hog left the group, stepped neatly over the red-tined pitchfork and began to slash and worry at the dead hog. Close by its devil-split hooves, Fat's derringer glinted in the dust.

The deputy looked away. His emptied face beading with sweat, he guessed he wouldn't have much appetite for pork or bacon for a while. Breathing up and down, he blinked at the crawling marks that led to Old Man Rokus's shack.

Clutching his revolver, he ran quickly to the edge of the dark doorway. "Come out of there."

He could hear agonized breathing.

Leaping inside, crouching as if he expected a bullet, he made out a shape straining up on the unmade bed.

"Mr. Rokus?"

Old Man Rokus was trying to pull down his rifle from the wall, but the leather sling was caught on one of the nails, and he couldn't seem to pull himself up enough to lift the rifle free, and he gave up and

began to curse his luck.

"Can't even git my rifle," he cried angrily. "The vet, sonny boy, git the vet. Fats has gone loco, spearin' my hogs with the pitchfork, screamin' at 'em. Tried to stop him. Didn't see his derringer."

"Lay back, Mr. Rokus." The deputy tried to unbutton the filthy long underwear; this was no time to tell him his two boys were dead.

"No, keep away. I'll look after myself." The old man twisted in weak terror as the deputy unbuttoned the underwear.

"Leave me be!" On the side of the old man's ribs, the derringer shot had smashed a dark bruise with a darker center.

It seemed as if the old man had no blood, and the deputy's fingers, tangling with the string the old man wore around his neck inside his underwear, probed backward along the ribs. Old Man Rokus moaned and flinched.

"You ain't hurt much. You're lucky. The bullet skidded along the outside of your rib bones. I can feel it—a lump right under the skin."

The deputy withdrew his hand and the string. There it hung on the end of the string, a piece of tin, dull with grease, stamped: GOOD LUCK.

It was Mr. Cuyler's lucky piece.

With an angry grunt, the deputy dragged Old Man Rokus off the bed on to the floor. "Get up, you murderin' jealous old bushwhacker!"

The deputy wrestled the old man to his feet and shoved him out into the dust. "I want the Marshal to see you."

"It was *you* all these six miserable months, it was you bushwhacked Billy's paw!" Shoving into the knife-edged sunlight, the deputy squinted up the street. "Wait till——."

"Marshal—," he shouted, his voice fading along the street.

He tried to run, dragging the old man by the arm and stumbling, cursing the old man, letting him fall, and running, cried out again.

Beyond the O.K. Hotel, beyond the town and toward the distant mountains, the heavy outline of a rider was blending with the dust.

"Wait, Marshal!" The deputy ran along the street, lurching, waving his arm, and he hallooed and coyote-yipped, trying to cross the distance between them, and ran harder.

"Mar-shal," he bleated, whirling suns of exertion filling his eyes.

"Marshal," he croaked and, dragging out his revolver as he ran, thumbed the hammer, staggering from the explosion.

He ran with the blind staggers toward the Marshal, who had

reined his horse's head around and sat there in black outline.

Gasping, the deputy reached out, he clutched the stirrup, he looked up. The agony of exertion on his face was swept away by his boyish excitement and triumph.

"Marshal—Billy Cuyler's paw—Old Man Rokus was the bushwhacker."

The Marshal just sat there. Already his face was covered with dust.

"Marshal, don't you understand me? It was Old Man Rokus.—We got ourselves a hanging!"

There was the creak of saddle leather as the horse's head reined away, and the horse and rider moved on toward the mountains.

The new marshal stood there, too young to wonder very long, and lay *dead* before the dry river filled again, outdrawn by some drunken cowpoke.

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## NEXT MONTH—

MICHAEL INNES' *APPLEBY'S FABLES*

LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN'S

*ALDINE FOLIO MURDERS*

LOUIS GOLDING'S *TWO MEN IN A TRAIN*

RUSSELL JANNEY'S

*ACCESSORY BEFORE THE FACT*

*and*

THE SAINT

AND

THE STORY OF A DEAD MAN

A Saint Novelet by *LESLIE CHARTERIS*

—in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

# BROTHERS OFFENDED

by

**GEORGE FIELDING ELIOT**

Harry Williams, who was playing second base for the visiting Pelicans against the State Prison's Yardbirds, began to hope that he might actually get through the game and out the gate without coming face to face with his convict brother Paul.

Paul played for the Yardbirds, of course. The one thing the brothers had always had in common was a love for baseball. But Paul was a pitcher, and so far this afternoon the Yardbirds' manager had kept him on the bench or where he was now, warming up. Trotting out to the keystone sack for the last half of the ninth, Harry observed with satisfaction that Paul was still at it, over at the foot of the great concrete wall in the dusty space which served the Yardbirds as a bull-pen.

The scoreboard that hung on the wall just below the guard tower read VISITORS 3—YARDBIRDS 2. Three more outs, and Harry Williams would be on his way—safe from any embarrassing encounter which might reveal to his teammates (and so to everybody in Deer Falls) that he had a brother doing fifteen to twenty-five here in the Big House.

That cold knot of fear which had taken possession of Harry's stomach when he first heard about the annual prison game began slowly to dissolve.

He hadn't wanted to come to

Deer Falls in the first place, to live in the shadow of the prison and of Paul's presence there. But the chance had been too good to refuse. Also, a coming young assistant manager for Mammoth Markets didn't turn down the first manager's job he was offered: not unless he wanted Old Man Shallott to mark him as lacking in self-reliance and ambition. Old Man Shallott had a reputation for not giving second chances. Harry Williams knew he was on the way up with Mammoth Markets—if he didn't blot his copybook with the Old Man. He'd talked it over with Ann, of course. She knew all about Paul. Harry had no secrets from Ann. Ann had said in her quiet way: "You've nothing to be ashamed of, Harry. You can't keep on running away all your life from what Paul's done. And we have to think of Harry junior, too." There was no arguing with that. So they'd come to Deer Falls, the store was doing well, and Harry had made friends as he always did. Also he'd promptly got himself on the local ball-club—which was good for Harry, good for the store and a wonderful source of excitement for little Harry, aged five, who strutted in vicarious glory among his kindergarten fellows.

What with one raise already and the prospects of a whopping bonus at Christmas time, Harry'd almost forgotten about Paul up there on the hill in the Big House—until the day the team manager reminded his players to have their identification photographs made for the Yardbird game. Up to then, Yardbirds had been just a name on a schedule to Harry. He hadn't realized that this game meant going inside the great gray prison to play the prison team —a team on which, he felt in his bones, he'd find his brother Paul playing against him.

But he couldn't back out. Already he was the mainstay of the Pelican infield and runner-up for top of the batting list. The boys just wouldn't understand if he pulled a fast one like an attack of some mysterious virus. Deer Falls wasn't a big city like Lanchester where a man had some privacy. Faking sick in Deer Falls was pretty nearly impossible to get away with. Harry had gone so far as to hint to Herb Wyman, the Pelicans' manager, that he wasn't feeling so hot, and Wyman had insisted that he go right off to Doc Overbrook just to make sure he wouldn't miss the Yardbird game.

All Harry could do after that was to hope against hope that somehow he'd get by without having everybody find out that his brother was doing time. Outside spectators

weren't allowed—too much trouble about security. That was a help. But there were plenty of nosey characters on the team itself, and of course Tom Yeandle, the sports writer for the Deer Falls Bugle, would be there with notebook and cameras. There was no use expecting Paul to show any consideration for Harry's feelings. Harry had passed several sleepless nights picturing his brother coming right up to him in front of all his friends, hand outstretched and that well-remembered mocking smile playing around his mouth. And even if Paul didn't say a word, there remained the fact that though they weren't twins—Harry was two years older than Paul—they looked as much alike as though they were. Just let Paul get on base, so the two of them could be seen close together, and the fat'd be in the fire.

Five years it had been since Paul's long series of difficulties with the law had wound up with a bank robbery in which his two companions had been shot and Paul had gotten away with the loot. The law had caught up with Paul, but not with the Lanchester National Bank's thirty thousand dollars. Paul stubbornly refused to say what he'd done with the money. That was why the judge had thrown the book at him—fifteen to twenty-five years. Folks in Lanchester knew in a vague sort of way that Paul and Harry Williams were brothers, but Harry hadn't mixed himself up in the trial and the fact of the relationship had been pretty well forgotten. It hadn't followed Harry to the jobs where Mammoth had assigned him; it hadn't followed him here to Deer Falls. There were plenty of people named Williams, thank the Lord. But now—

Now, anyway, there were just those three outs, and then according to the careful instructions of the warden, the visiting team would all move quickly off the field and over to the side gate, where they'd be checked out, give up the passes which were pinned to their shirts (each one bearing a passport-size photograph of the wearer) and go through the double gate to their waiting cars. The warden had apologized for not providing them with showers and facilities for changing their clothes, but had pointed out that as soon as the game was over his major task was to get twelve hundred convicts back to their cells and this would be dangerously complicated if he had also to play host to fifteen visiting ball-players and a sports writer.

Ann would be waiting out there with little Harry—maybe after all it would be a smiling, carefree hus-

band who'd come out to her.

Harry swept a quick glance along the low-built tiers of bleachers in the angle of the wall—the gray masses that jammed them were yelling now for one more run to tie the score. Beyond, the lean form of his brother Paul wound up, threw, waited, wound up and threw again, like some mechanical doll. Did Paul know his brother was out at second base? He must. The Bugle circulated freely in the prison, and the Bugle had had pictures of the team, complete with names. Yet Paul hadn't so much as looked hard toward second base. Harry felt a little better about Paul. Maybe after all—

One man had already filed out.

Two to go. One strike on this one—

"Strike tuh!" barked the plate umpire.

The Yardbird batter had swung so savagely that he'd whirled clear around. He stepped out of the box —a big rangy fellow in his gray uniform and blue cap, looking much like any other ball player though not quite as sporty as the Pelicans. The Pelicans wore gray, too, but they had bright red caps which matched the sleeves of their red jerseys and the jaunty Pelican insignes on their shirts.

Now the batter was ready—

"Strike—th-ree!"

He'd looked at that one. Two away. A stocky, heavy-set man came up to the plate—the Yardbird catcher. Al Rohrbach, the Pelican pitcher, wound up, pitched—Crack! A bounding ball between third and short—a hit. The bleachers went mad as the catcher pulled up at first. He seemed to limp a little—

The Yardbird manager was saying something to the ump. Now he waved an arm toward the bull-pen. The umpire, who doubled in brass as announcer—and had the brass voice for the purpose—bawled:

"Williams now running for Kosulski!"

Harry Williams saw his brother Paul slip on a gray windbreaker and come trotting toward first. Paul was taking no chances with his pitching arm after all that warming-up. Just in case it was needed. Anyway, here he came—and another hit, even a base on balls, would send him down to second. Harry glanced unhappily at Herb Wyman, playing short. Herb had sharp eyes that didn't miss much. The grayish dust of the prison yard rose in puffs around Paul's trotting feet.

The next batter was in the box, swinging his stick easily, his jaw set in a do-or-die expression.

Paul was taking a lead off first. The catcher went shuffling back to-

ward the bench, trailed by dust clouds.

Rohrbach went into his stretch.

Harry could hardly keep his mind on the game—he kept looking down the baseline at Paul, dancing back and forth as though ready to dash at the first crack of wood on horsehide—

From the corner of his eye he saw Rohrbach deliver—

And here came Paul, running like a wild man: trying to steal second on the first ball pitched. The bleachers were pandemonium—

Harry jumped for the base, ready for the throw from the plate.

The catcher's arm pumped. The ball came straight for Harry's glove. Paul didn't have a prayer—

Something crashed against Harry's legs, knocking them from under him. Down he went in a choking swirl of dust—and the world dissolved in a bright flash of flame swallowed by instant darkness . . .

. . . Paul Williams had watched carefully, hopefully, fighting down the surging excitement inside.

Of course the team manager, Schwartz, knew Paul had a caper coming up: but he didn't know what, and he didn't want to know. Paul's deal with him was plain and simple. With a man on first in the ninth, one or two out, Paul would go in to run. With two out and nobody on, Paul would pinch hit and hope to get on himself, somehow.

Either way, nobody could blame the manager for what might happen afterward. That was Paul's worry.

In fact Paul had been worrying at the angles of this deal ever since the Deer Falls Bugle had brought him the news that his dear brother Harry would be coming inside the walls to play second base for the Pelicans against the Yardbirds.

Paul meant to walk out the gate with his brother Harry's pass pinned on his shirt. It was an opportunity that certainly couldn't be expected to knock twice.

It took some thinking out, though.

Harry had helped, if he only knew it.

Paul knew good and well who it was that sent him ten dollars every month for his commissary account, to enable him to buy cigarettes and candy and toothpaste. So Paul had little things to trade for little favors: more than most of his associates. For instance, he could induce a man in the band to rummage around in the wings of the auditorium and get him some old bunting that had been used to decorate the place for the Fourth of July. The red stripe off that bunting, pieced together by another fellow in the tailor shop when the guard

wasn't looking, made the two red sleeves that were rolled up under the sleeves of Paul's gray baseball shirt right now: and the pelican insigne that was tucked in his shirt pocket, ready to pull out. These cons, like the manager, knew Paul was up to something, but they didn't know any details.

With Joe Civotta, it had to be a little different. Joe was the Yardbirds' trainer, and also third-base coach. Joe's part in the caper was to watch for the crash and then run to pick up the supposedly injured Paul. In doing so, Joe took some risk. To carry it through, he had to know what he was doing and why. But Joe Civotta was as square and trustworthy as they came. Joe was Paul's pal. He could count on old Joe. The whole idea would never have taken form in Paul's mind if it hadn't been that Joe'd be there, available and ready.

The sap Paul had made for himself, using a heavy ball bearing he'd swiped from the machine shop where he worked, and a piece of leather from an old belt. It was coiled in his pocket now, ready. It had better be ready. Two out in the ninth, and Kosulski up. That thick-headed manager had got his signals mixed. He should have sent Paul in to bat for Kosulski. Now if Kosulski fanned—No! There he went. Paul stood still, staring at the manager on the bench—Ah. He'd remembered. He'd risked the whole deal, but at last he'd remembered.

He was waving Williams in to run for Kosulski.

Paul slipped on his windbreaker. The dust rose under his feet as he went toward first at a jog-trot. The good old dust of that weary prison ball-field. It was part of his plan. A big part.

He could see Harry looking his way.

All the frustrations and antagonisms of the years rose into his throat. Respectable Harry. Harry the example. Harry the hard worker. Harry the—

Damn Harry. Harry was going to get him out of stir, and the hell with what happened to Harry afterward. Maybe they'd think Harry was in on the caper—

He'd go on the first pitch. No waiting now. There was no more patience left inside Paul Williams. There went the ball—the dust flew high under Paul's feet as he tore down the base-line. He could see Harry jump for the bag to take the throw. Just as he'd figured. He flung his feet forward and slid, feet up, aiming for Harry's knees. No spikes. Just a knock down—

He felt the jarring crash of impact, saw Harry go down right

alongside him in the choking dust. He struck—hard and true; he felt the sap thud on Harry's skull. Somewhere somebody was yelling. Harry was limp.

Paul rolled over, came to his knees, came out of the windbreaker as his body lifted. Two quick swipes dragged down the red sleeves, a flip of the hand lifted the red pelican from his shirt pocket, caught the little pinhook that held it fast at the bottom. As the dust cleared away, he was bending over Harry; Harry's red cap was on his head, the windbreaker hid Harry's red sleeves—he was the picture of the solicitous sportsman, feeling for the heart of the man he'd injured—

They were crowding around now, two or three of the Pelicans and the base umpire—here came Joe Civotta, pushing through with a sharp word: "Stand back, please. That man's knocked out."

Paul stood up, hands drawn up to his chest as though gasping for breath. Actually he was fastening Harry's pass-badge to his own shirt. Joe Civotta had another man with him: a con Paul knew only by sight. They were picking Harry up; the windbreaker was so draped around his torso that not a scrap of red could be seen. Joe had even jammed Paul's blue cap on his brother's head.

"Lend a hand, here. We'll carry him to the bench where he'll be out of this dust. He ain't hurt bad."

The Pelican shortstop said to Paul:

"Did he spike you, Harry?"

Paul shook his head.

"Not hurt—a bit, Herb," he half gasped. Not for nothing had he studied those newspaper pictures and the names on the Pelican batting order.

The deputy warden had turned up from somewhere and was talking to Joe Civotta, looking down at Harry lying on the bench.

Now he turned away, came toward the plate umpire.

The umpire nodded and sang out:

"Game's over! Runner's out for interfering with an infielder."

"This way, please, all the visiting team!" shouted the deputy.

Paul became aware that the bleachers were alive with yells and cat-calls. Cons were standing on the benches, others were milling out toward the diamond. A few yard screws were trying to herd them back. Nobody seemed to be quite sure what had happened in the heart of that dustcloud. The deputy's one thought was to get the visitors out of here before any trouble could start. You never knew.

Paul walked quietly toward the

gate with the Pelicans. Several of them spoke to him, asking anxiously if he were hurt. He just shook his head, trying to seem just a little dazed but not enough so that the deputy'd insist on having the doctor look him over.

Inside, he was seething with excited self-appreciation. Slick and easy and not a single suspicion in anybody's mind. Why should there be? A man in Pelican uniform had been knocked down by a man wearing a windbreaker over a plain gray uniform. A man in Pelican uniform was walking off the field; the other man was lying on a bench. The man in Pelican uniform wore a photographic badge that matched his features exactly. Everyone had been too excited to notice how closely the two men resembled each other.

The warden himself stood by the gate.

"This way, gentlemen. Please show your passes to the guard here and then give them to the guard at the second gate as you go out. I'm sorry the game has ended so abruptly. Thank you for coming—thank you all for coming."

Paul grinned at the warden, showed his pass to the guard, was checked through into the enclosure between the two gates. This was the truck entrance; there was room for one gate to be closed behind a truck before the other was opened.

"What happened, Harry?" A little man with a camera over his shoulder came panting up, clawing at Paul's elbow. This would be Tom Yeandle of the Bugle, Paul guessed; he couldn't be sure. So he said:

"Nothing much. Just an eager beaver. Call me at home, will you?" He managed to break away naturally enough by making a fuss over unpinning his badge and handing it to the gate guard, a fattish fellow named McDermott whom Paul knew well. McDermott took the badge, glanced at the photograph, nodded, opened the gate with a clatter of keys. It never seemed to occur to him that this fellow in the red cap was the spitting image of Paul Williams, No. 14-769.

Paul walked through the gate and drew in a deep breath of the air of freedom. There was a concrete driveway outside, giving entrance from the street. Across the street were a couple of houses—one of them was the warden's. There were a couple of parked cars—and a waiting bus. Paul walked toward it. This must be the transportation provided to get back to the clubhouse. He didn't want to get aboard it, but it seemed to be the natural thing to do. He'd make an excuse to drop off—

Somebody was gently beeping a

car-horn. A woman's voice called:

"Harry! Here we are!

"Hey, Harry!" chattered the newsman. "You better listen to your missus!"

Paul swore under his breath. This was worse than the bus. A couple of the Pelicans were looking at him curiously. He managed to grin.

"Shook me up some, I guess," he muttered, and veered toward the maroon Buick that was parked just ahead of the bus. He could see a blonde head at the window, a beckoning hand. The blonde head belonged to Ann, his brother Harry's wife. He'd seen her picture in the paper when Harry had first ome to take over the Mammoth Market in Deer Falls. He'd have to bull this through somehow.

Paul opened the door of the Buick and got in beside Ann.

She sat very still, looking at him. The color drained from her face, leaving it dead white.

After a moment she said in a low voice:

"Paul—what have you done to Harry?" . . .

. . . Ann Williams didn't know that the man in the Pelican wasn't her husband until he was actually in the car, seated at her side. Then she knew. Knew by a thousand little details. Knew also, by the astonishing resemblance of feature that this must be Harry's brother Paul.

Her first question was instinctive —What have you done to Harry?

"Harry's all right. Knocked out is all," the man snapped. "Get going, sister. Get me away from here. Or else."

He slapped something into the palm of his left hand—a snake-like something, evil, eloquent of violence.

Instinctively Ann obeyed him: the obedience of fear. The car slid away from the curb—

"So long, Harry!"—"See ya, Harry!"—

The man beside her waved a careless hand, but his eyes never left her face. His eyes were not careless. They were cold with threat.

"Where—shall I take you?" she asked, dry-lipped.

"Your house," he ordered. "I'll be needing some of Harry's clothes —and the car. Do as I tell you and you won't get hurt."

Somehow she believed that. He was a lot like Harry—She sought reassurance:

"You're certain — Harry's not badly hurt?"

"Just a tap on the head; he'll be coming to pretty soon," he answered.

"But then—they'll be after you?"

He grinned at her. She was astonished to discover this his grin was gay, almost attractive.

"They'll have him in the infirmary by this time," he explained. "I know the screw—the guard, that is—who's on duty there. A thick-headed Dutchman with the imagination of a lump of concrete. It'll take Harry quite a while to convince Pop Kellermann that he's really Harry Williams and not Paul Williams and that Pop ought to call the warden. Maybe an hour or two."

"But his uniform? That's not Harry's uniform you're wearing."

"No. But they'll have taken his uniform off outside. Maybe it'll get lost, or something." He grinned again.

"You planned it—you have friends who—"

The grin vanished.

"That's enough of that. Never mind my friends," he growled. "Just get some speed out of this bus. And no tricks."

All the time, Ann's desperate mind was on little Harry, asleep on the back seat.

He was a tired baby—so tired he'd only stirred and murmured and gone right back to sleep even when she'd beeped the horn. If this man—she couldn't think of him as her husband's brother—were to—to—

Ann had heard and read far too much about children being carried off as hostages by fleeing criminals. She hoped—she prayed—that Paul wouldn't turn around. And that little Harry would stay asleep—

But how could she get him out of the car unseen when they reached the house?

"Who's we?" asked Paul suddenly.

"We?" she gasped.

"Back there you said, 'Here we are'—" He turned and looked behind him. "Oh," he said in a tone different from any he had used to her—a tone neither threatening nor gaily defiant. "Oh. A kid. Yours?"

She nodded.

"Ours," she answered.

Watching him, she thought his face softened a little as he looked at the sleeping boy.

"How old?" he asked.

"Five."

"Five," he repeated. "My boy's five, too. Five last month. The 16th."

Ann swallowed.

"You—haven't seen him lately?" she half-whispered.

His lips tightened.

"No. I don't know where he is. But I'll find him. That's why I crashed out of stir, if you want to know."

They were down in the residential

part of town now, with the gray-walled prison high on its hill behind them. A few blocks more—

Ann's thoughts were racing far ahead of the sedately moving car.

Suppose Paul did as he said: took Harry's clothes and the car and went off to look for his boy. Sooner or later, they'd catch him.

"They won't catch me before I find my kid," Paul said sharply, and she realized she'd spoken her thought aloud. "I know where to look. His mother—my wife—Stella—I can find her. I want to get that kid. Stella's no fit person to bring up a kid. I'll attend to that myself somewhere—I've got the money—"

He broke off sharply, shooting Ann a quick suspicious glance.

"I'm talking too much," he said. "We pretty near there?"

"One more block, and two to the left," Ann told him. "Paul, that's why you wouldn't tell them where you hid the money, isn't it? You wanted it for your boy?"

"Not at first," he admitted. "I wanted it for myself. I thought it'd be easy, getting out. But it wasn't so easy. Now I want to use it for him. Even if they catch me, afterward. If I can just fix him up with some good family—"

Ann steered the car around the corner into the street on which she lived.

"But they *will* catch you, Paul. And then your boy will know that his father's a—a criminal. He won't find that easy to live with, Paul. Even if somehow you can fix it about the money—when he grows up he won't like to think he's been—"

"He knows all about me now," Paul interrupted. "Stella's a blabbermouth. Especially after a few shots of hooch. What she hasn't told him already she will later—if I don't get him away from her before he's old enough to really understand what she's talking about."

Ann pulled the car to the curb in front of her home and shut off the engine.

She had made her choice—her desperate choice.

"Paul," she said, "your boy isn't with Stella. He's right there in the back seat of this car."

His hand closed on her arm.

"You're lying!" he gasped.

His fingers were biting cruelly into her flesh, but she kept pain from her face and voice.

"I'm not a liar, Paul," she told him. "Stella brought little Harry to us a month after you—went away. He was only three months old then. She said just what you said—that she was no fit person to bring up a child. Harry and I have brought him up in the belief that he is our

son. Do you know what it will do to him—now and later—if he finds out the truth?"

His eyes, rimmed by caked dust, were pools of angry flame.

"You—you—I'll take him with me!" he cried desperately. "He's mine—"

"And when they catch you?" she asked, forcing her voice to cold disdain while panic surged in her heart. "I thought it was to help your son that you took the risk of breaking prison. Not to—destroy him."

He sat there staring at her in the rays of the sinking sun while time passed to the borders of eternity.

Then he said:

"What do you want me to do?"

"Go back," said Ann. "Go back now. Before they start after you. You said—perhaps an hour? There's still time."

"No!" he cried. "No! I'll never go back! I might have known you—"

"Wait, Paul," Ann cut in. "Listen to me. You don't need the money for little Harry now. You can tell them where it is. That will mean—some consideration, won't it?"

"I'll see them in hell first!" he snarled at her. "I'm going—"

His hand was on the door handle.

"Wait!" she cried again. "I'm not pleading for myself—I'm begging you to really do what you say you're doing: to think of your son. He's a fine boy, Paul. He'll be a fine man—if you don't throw the shadow of your own misdeeds across his life. He doesn't need that money. Nor do you have any chance to enjoy it. But you do have a chance to gain your freedom—maybe not right away, but sooner than you'd thought. Harry'll help you. So will I. And you can come out that gate again, a free man, and know your boy is growing up—happy and self-respecting—"

"And never knowing who his father is," Paul muttered.

"All right," snapped Ann. "Run now, you coward. Run away from yourself and your duty and your child. He'll know who his father is soon enough, when they catch you. So will everybody else in town. Do you know how cruel children can be, Paul? Will it make you happier when you're back up there to remember that Harry's playmates are mocking him—telling him his daddy's a jailbird?"

"What's a jailbird, Mama?" asked little Harry sleepily from the back seat.

"My God!" breathed Paul. "I—you suppose he—"

"Too young to catch on fast," said Ann rapidly. "It'll be forgotten tomorrow—if—"

"Who's that, Mama?" demanded

little Harry, sounding fully awake by this time.

"A friend of Papa's, dear," said desperate Ann.

"A friend of yours, too, son," said Paul Williams, turning around and thrusting a hand across the back of the seat. "Shake on it?"

"Sure!" The little hand came out confidingly. "Mama! Can I have a piece of jelly bread?"

Ann reached back and swung open a rear door.

"You scoot over to Mrs. Raines, darling," she invited, "and ask her to give you some jelly bread. Stay there till Mama comes for you."

"Gee!" cried little Harry and darted across the lawn, well aware that Mrs. Raines was likely to be far more generous with jelly bread than his careful Mama.

"You're quite a girl, Ann," Paul Williams said softly, watching his son clatter up the Raines' back steps. "Much too good for that stuffed shirt brother of mine. Let's go—before I get cold feet."

He grinned at her again—not with gayety but with wry humor as though he were laughing at himself.

"Something tells me, Ann," he chuckled, as the car swung away from the curb, "that we'll find the warden very cooperative about keeping this caper quiet. It wouldn't look so good for him if the word got around that he held the jail-house door open with his own hands for one of his cons to walk out of. Ann! If you don't stop crying you'll never get me safe back home . . ."

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## THAT BLESSED FOG

A Paris newspaper has been wondering aloud why the best detective stories are English. It seems Dr. Adenauer put the question to General de Gaulle recently, but got no precise answer. Here, so they say, are the reasons . . .

The English live, nine months out of twelve, in a fog that's so thick that they can't recognize each other three feet away. They've therefore developed abnormal powers of investigation.

The English, as everybody knows, make it a point of honour never to show their feelings and to always keep a "wooden" expression (so says this newspaper). The fundamental law of detective stories, that the murderer's identity must not be revealed until the last page, is clearly in their favor.

Only an English author can keep a secret to himself for 250 pages. A Frenchman would betray it at once, and a Slav or German take it with him to the grave.

Last, but by no means least, good police work is a question of tenacity—in other words, an English matter. . . . . .

# The Educated Thief

**by FRANKLIN GREGORY**

It was Chief of Bombay Detectives Jahveri who first told Ragland about the educated thief, months before Lorna Grey came to Ragland for help.

"Worst crook in India," Jahveri had growled, spreading his lean dark hands in a most unpolice-like gesture of frustration. "But dash it, is it my fault our big Parsi bankers won't admit being swindled? You know how those ruddy fire worshipers are. All pride."

Ragland had smiled. Jahveri himself was a high caste Hindu who worshiped not one but a whole gaggle of curious gods.

"He robs widows, too," Jahveri said with contempt. He'd said it almost as an afterthought, which was natural enough in a land where widows do not account for much. "Blast it, I hate greed."

The man was called Sarnar Chor, and Ragland gathered he'd parlayed a genius for confidence schemes into enough wealth to become almost respectable—a small, and usurious, private bank; a fine home on Malabar Hill. But it was his given name that tickled Ragland. Sarnar is a Tamil word for useless, and Ragland observed that surely the mother had a weird sense of humor.

"More likely the village astrologer," Jahveri grunted. He was un-

doubtedly right, astrology exerting the powerful hold that it does on Indian life.

"A name like that could drive anyone to crime."

"Listen, Peter." Jahveri poked Ragland's knee. "I dare you to print it. As a child he resented that name so much he swore he would make it the most famous in his caste."

"Laudable. What went wrong?"

Jahveri sniggered.

"Nothing. Nothing went wrong. He belongs to the Maravar caste, that's all."

"Oh no, not really!" Ragland exploded with laughter. For the Maravars, he well knew, are a criminal tribe whose members are born to thievery just as Shikaris are born to become hunters or Banias to become shopkeepers.

"Ah, you appreciate that?" Jahveri's black eyes gleamed maliciously. "Then hear what your confounded missionaries did. They took this little hoodlum into their mission school. They taught him to read, to write, to add, to subtract. Yes, subtraction is most essential to a thief, I think. And because he was bright, he carried off all the prizes."

"Come off it," grinned Ragland. "Surely the missionaries didn't know about his vow."

"I do not say that. But by Kali, did they have to send him to college in America?"

"What!"

"Just so—in one of your high-minded student exchange programs. And do you wish to know what this great scholar studied? Every course in criminology he could lay his larcenous hands upon. Is it any wonder he is so clever we can hang nothing on him?"

The missionaries, Peter reflected, must have been quite embarrassed to have Sarnar Chor turn out like that. And then the story slipped into the limbo of all those strange matters which attended a busy life of travel and reporting. Not for nearly a year did events bring him back to Bombay. Maharashtrians were storming the streets, upsetting cars and lorries, flaunting their black flag in angry demand for a state of their own. For three days and nights Peter worked like a dog. Then, as quickly as they flared, the riots subsided. And at mid-morning Monday, November the 1st—edgy, tired, needing a shave—Peter made his way across the Apollo Bunder to enter the Taj Mahal Hotel. Quite suddenly, the world seemed kind and restful. For there, erect in a high back chair near the reception desk, sat Lorna Grey.

She was trim, slim-legged, brown-haired and just what the doctor or-

dered. She was young. She was chic in her fresh linen dress. And there was something familiar about her resolute chin and large, resolute eyes. She got up and came toward him with supple, athletic grace.

"I don't think you remember me, Mr. Ragland," she said with cool directness. "The Hippodrome, London? The Flying Greys?"

Ragland checked an impulse to whistle.

"Golly, you've grown up," he said foolishly.

"I guess people do," Lorna said. She was fourteen perhaps when he'd written that magazine piece; the awkward age for most youngsters, but somehow circus children seem to skip that painful phase. Even then she had been lithe and poised on the high trapeze.

"You haven't any idea how much that interview helped," Lorna said. "Dad got loads of bookings. So when I read in 'Arrivals' that you were here in Bombay, I said to Mom: 'Why can't he do it again?' "

Stranded, guessed Ragland with feeling. Lorna read his thought.

"It does happen, you know, to even the best troupers. If only Dad—" Her cool voice faltered. "Didn't you read—?"

"I've been in Nepal."

Composing herself, Lorna said: "I suppose it had to happen. We'd played to marvelous houses in Australia. But when we opened here, we didn't go over at all. Something bothered Dad and it seemed to infect the whole act. Then he got the idea we would draw better if . . . if he gave them the triple."

Ragland stared.

"At his age?"

One needn't belong to the Circus Fans Association to know that the triple somersault, with its demand for the finest timing and superb coordination, is the most dangerous of flying maneuvers. Only a handful of trapeze artists—the Concellos, Codona, Ernie Clark, and Freddie Grey in his prime—had performed it regularly.

"We buried him two weeks ago," Lorna said simply. And Ragland thought with compassion: Freddie Grey, the Iowa boy who ran away from home to join the Greatest Show on Earth; who'd married that fine arcobatic comedienne, Agatha Hackett, and formed the Flying Greys. Risk is the business of great performers, but it was not pleasant to think of one dead whose entire life was dedicated to grace and action. Then Lorna erupted:

"If it weren't for that damn Sarnar Chor!"

"Who?" Ragland demanded. But he had heard the first time.

She told about it when they had settled in the mezzanine lounge where tall windows overlook the purple waters of the harbor. A white P. & O. liner was gliding slowly past, outbound for Suez, and Lorna did not take her eyes from it until the turbaned bearer brought the tea Ragland ordered.

"The thing is," she said, "we never did know how Dad managed our affairs."

The plural also included Lorna's twin brother, Joe. The act always got top billing. There was always ready money. They'd lived in the nicer hotels, but they were not extravagant.

"Not that Dad was secretive," Lorna explained. "He just never thought to tell us how things were."

Only after the funeral when they went through his disordered papers did they learn how fabulously successful some of their runs had been. That was when they learned that from Down Under alone, but two months ago, they had taken the Sterling equivalent of twenty-five thousand dollars.

"And now," guessed Peter, "nothing to show for it?"

Lorna smiled ruefully.

"Oh, plenty. But—"

She reached for her bag and into her lap tumbled as pretty an array of stock certificates as any engraver had ever practiced his art upon. They were gilt-edged and stamped with imposing seals. They bore gaudy pictures of horns of plenty and gold miners working with pick and pan. They were impressed with all the right words: "fully paid . . . non-assessable." And they were also, Ragland's practiced eye informed him at once, utterly worthless. Selecting a sample called "Indian Creek Gold & Uranium of Canada, 1000 Shares," he said:

"I guess you thought you were pretty rich."

"Gosh. Rich as Croesus until we took them to Lloyd's for appraisal."

Obviously the late Freddie Grey had been a prize specimen of what Barnum had said was born every minute. It was also painfully apparent from the geographic distribution of the shares that his celebrated name had stood high on every sucker list circulating among international confidence men. Only a colossal optimist could have believed any of the investments would ever pay off.

Something called "Rangoon Ruby, Union of Burma" caught Ragland's interest. Fishing it out he uncovered a complete and roseate prospectus of a gemming venture formed just after the war.

"Your father, I'd say, bought up one entire corporation."

Lorna nodded grimly. "We played Rangoon last year."

"Which did Chor sell him?"

Lorna picked through the assortment.

"These. Assamese Products, Ltd. A tea plantation, I think."

"Could be." Peter remembered the miles of blighted tea estates he'd seen on his last visit to Assam. "You've tried to get the money back?"

"Joe has. My brother. Mr. Chor has a small bank near the Bombay Exchange, but the clerks always say he is out."

"The police?"

"Yes." Wearily. "I went with Joe. A man named Jahveri saw us. He said it was all legal. I got," she spoke slowly, "the distinct impression they don't care much what happens to Americans."

It was like Jahveri.

"And your father paid twenty-five thousand dollars for these?"

"Yes, but there's a memo here showing he agreed to buy even more. Twenty thousand rupees . . . about four thousand dollars, isn't it? And here's a letter from Mr. Chor pressing him for payment. I'm sure that's why Dad worried so about our rotten houses. And—and why he tried the triple."

"What you're really saying, of course, is that Chor practically murdered your father."

"I think he did," Lorna said quickly. "You know—the theatre manager never did pay us for our last week. Mr. Chor tied up our percentage."

She said it so matter-of-factly that a moment passed before the cruel significance struck Ragland. Then he remembered Jahveri's callous, "He robs widows, too."

Seldom if ever did Peter Ragland display his stronger emotions. And now he sat quite still, not even a clouding of eye suggesting the cold fury that possessed him. Nor was it a fury directed against Sarnar Chor alone, but at all those anonymous swindlers who for so long had preyed upon a simple man who had given the world so much pleasure. At length:

"Do you have an agent?"

"Dad was his own agent. That's why I thought . . . well, we'd have to revamp the act . . . but if you sent out a story about us and some agent saw it and booked us . . . oh darn! It sounds so complicated the way I say it."

"And advance passage money? No, nor very practical either. Take too long. D'ya have any money at all?"

"Mom pawned some rings. We can eat for a while."

"Did you know the United States

Consul would pay passage home?"

"Yes, but he won't pay freight on five tons of traps. Rigging and nets that we're no good without."

Out of an incident of his early police reporting days, the seed of a solution was stirring in Ragland's mind. Thoughtfully he asked:

"Have you ever met Chor?" She shook her head. "Would he know any of you?"

The question amused her.

"Our pictures were only on every billboard in Bombay."

"Yes, in costume. But suppose he saw you in street dress? And suppose you made up differently than you ordinarily do? I know your mother could do it. She was a very great impersonator."

"What are you driving at?"

"And you," Peter said as if talking to himself. "You've been around India. Could you impersonate an Anglo-Indian girl?"

"I think so."

"Joe?"

"Oh he's a born ham."

Ragland stood up, smiling.

"Come. Let's trot round and see 'em."

You who remember Keith-Albee vaudeville in America must also recall the scatter-brained blonde with the fluttering hands of a Zasu Pitts and a calculated awkwardness at tumbling. A vibrant person on stage or off, she'd be nearing fifty now—a fact Ragland found hard to believe now that he met her again. Her skin was unblemished, her hair was still a rich blonde and perhaps she did things to it. For Agatha Hackett Grey was a sensible woman. Far from showing the mourning she felt, she wore a gay, low-cut frock appropriate both to her figure and the heat of Bombay's autumn. Indeed, one could not imagine her the mother of Lorna and Joe, the big-shouldered solemn youth who, like a well brought-up child, spoke not a word while Ragland outlined his scheme.

Whatever Joe's conversational lack, Agatha Grey more than made up. She examined the plan with relish, picked a flaw here (without in the least seeming to), added there a feminine touch, and—jumping from her chair—demonstrated just how she would play her role and how Lorna and Joe should play theirs.

From their cheap lodgings in Colaba Causeway, Ragland went to his bank, then to the telegraph office, to return finally to his hotel room where he mulled over the Rangoon Ruby certificates. He felt reasonably sure that they comprised the entire printing of shares of a company set up with swindle as the sole

objective. He felt even more certain after talking long distance with Mr. Louji Mukhopadhyay.

An alert reporter for a large American newspaper chain does not hang around Asia a number of years without getting to know a diversified lot of people. Mr. Mukhopadhyay was a wise and eminently respectable broker on the Calcutta Stock Market.

"Muk," after the opening pleasantries, "I want to open a small trading account."

Mr. Mukhopadhyay purred.

"I've just wired ten thousand rupees," Ragland went on with the tone of a man to whom two thousand dollars is peanuts. Mr. Mukhopadhyay purred some more.

"And look, Muk, I want to pick up some Rangoon Ruby."

Mr. Mukhopadhyay's purring stopped abruptly.

"Rangoon Ruby? I never heard of it, Peter."

"A little outfit over in Burma," Ragland said. "I've got a tip."

A second pause found Ragland smiling into the mouthpiece.

"Listen, Peter! An unlisted mining stock—a pup? You have too much sense. Do not please do it!"

"It's inside info, Muk. I can make me a lot of rupees. Buy up to two thousand shares and don't pay over five."

Again a pause, then with final reluctance:

"Very well, Peter. I will inform our correspondents at once to watch out for it. I hope you know what you are doing."

"I hope so, too," said Ragland, but he said it after ringing off.

Peter Ragland spent the rest of the afternoon fiddling with inks and stains and the much too fresh-looking certificates. He divided the next morning between his routine reportorial chores and the settling of Lorna and her mother in new, and separate, lodgings. Toward noon, having allowed Mr. Mukhopadhyay sufficient time to alert his corresponding brokers, he made his approach to Sarnar Chor. He made it cold, counting—correctly—on his own rather well-known name to arouse the man's curiosity.

For a professional thief, Sarnar Chor presented a most convincing front of legitimacy. His private bank in Churchgate Street radiated a conservative prosperity. Clerks bustled with fat ledgers in a large outer room; and, within his comfortable private office, flanked by an old-fashioned vault, the man himself sat composedly at a desk facing a wall of books intended doubtless to convey that he was a scholar.

The same air of prosperity and confidence was reflected in Mr.

Chor's appearance. His small, portly figure was clad in London clothes of conservative cut. He had the dark skin of a Madrasi; his accent, his slang reflected his American education; and there was a fixed smile to his full lips which, if appearing benign to the less observant, suggested to Ragland that he was both well pleased with himself and scornful of the world.

"Now why the hell you come here?" he demanded suspiciously after waving Peter to a chair but making sure the door remained open. "To write me up? Listen, brother, you repeat those damn lies about me, I'll sue."

Ragland smiled charmingly.

"And I wouldn't blame you at all. But Jahveri happened to mention your name—"

"What! That idiot sent you here?"

Adroitly Ragland had increased the man's suspicion, so essential to allaying it once and for all at the proper time.

"Really not. But from what he told me, you may be just the man I'm looking for. Of course you'll take some convincing. But I think you'll realize, getting about as I do, that I sometimes stumble on valuable information."

A flicker of interest crossed Chor's face.

"Have you ever, Mr. Chor, heard of Rangoon Ruby?"

Mr. Chor's dark eyes stared noncommittally at a point beyond Ragland's right ear, yet Peter could swear the name had meant nothing to him.

"It's a stock that was sold quietly some years ago when I first came to India," Ragland explained. "No assets, except a piece of land in the Mogok area northeast of Mandalay. I suppose you know that's where the best rubies come from?"

Mr. Chor's smile had grown thin. He knew the confidence game as no other man in Asia. Still, he was hardly prepared to hear Ragland say:

"Frankly, I wouldn't wonder the whole outfit was set up to support a swindle. I can't prove it, but I know that I bit for a thousand shares, preferred ordinary, at the par of two chips. You can see I was mighty green. And of course nothing happened."

Mr. Chor was now staring beyond Ragland's left ear.

"The point is, I was in Calcutta last week—"

"The paper said you arrived from Nepal."

"But I came by way of Calcutta," Ragland replied evenly. "You may check with the Great Eastern Hotel."

"Get on."

"What I heard—and I never spill

my sources—is that there's a gem strike on the land next to Rangoon Ruby's claim."

Once again the refrain was familiar, and Mr. Chor's smile grew even thinner. But again Ragland threw him off.

"That's got nothing to do with us, anyway. What is important, there's a syndicate in Calcutta secretly buying up the stock. And that's where we come in. They don't know where sixty percent of the stock is. I do."

If Mr. Chor had ever heard this particular tale before, or had told it himself, he gave no evidence. But his gaze shifted to the bridge of Ragland's nose and he seemed not quite so bored when he asked:

"Why don't you corner it then?"

"Why do you think I came to you? Money, of course. I lack it, you have it. A lot of money. I can buy that stock cheap and sell at a whale of a profit—within an hour."

Sarnar Chor pounced on what Ragland knew was the weakest point.

"You don't need me. You could option it."

"Oh I tried that. The owners won't do business that way."

"Strange."

"Not really. If you had some stock you'd always thought was no good and some utter stranger turned up suddenly and wanted an option, what would you think?"

Mr. Chor did not say what he would think. Ragland pressed:

"But the thing is, I'm sure if these people see spot cash, they'll sell."

Mr. Chor got up, stepped across the room, and closed the door.

"Let us," said he, "talk turkey."

Not often had Ragland encountered a man so skeptical. Sarnar Chor examined the scheme up and down, over and across. He hauled it apart and put it together again. He doubted, he demurred, he smelled rats. But always Ragland returned to the unassailable core of his proposition:

"Why talk? All you have to do is check with your own broker. Have him wire his Calcutta correspondent. If there's no market, that's that and so long. But if there is, I've got my shares to sell. You handle the sale yourself, establish a price."

He produced then a soiled certificate attesting that Peter Ragland owned shares 1000, preferred ordinary, Rangoon Ruby, Ltd., Union of Burma, par value 2 rupees. Accepting it in his manicured hands, Mr. Chor sniffed as if he could scent its value. Still suspicious, he lifted the telephone. He spoke for a little in Bombay Bat, that exotic jumble of Marathi, Gujarati and sundry other tongues which the city's diverse nationalities used as

their lingua franca. A half hour later his call was returned. He listened, then —holding his hand over the transmitter—he peered at Ragland steadily. The smile, so much a fixture, had vanished and Ragland's heart sank. Had something misfired? Not until Chor spoke di'd he realize that the smile was the man's defense against the world, a buffer for self-doubt, and that he no longer needed it once he found himself on sure ground.

"What shall we ask?"

"Four," said Ragland promptly.

They lunched near the Mint, then strolled round to Chor's broker on Elphinstone Circle to deliver the stock. It had sold by telegraph through a Calcutta correspondent at asking price and Ragland was handed a check for four thousand rupees less commission. For a long and thoughtful moment Mr. Chor looked at the check and he still seemed to be looking at it after Ragland put it away. Nor did he utter a word until they returned to his office.

"Okay," and he close'd the door, "how much can we get that stock for?"

"Well under two, I should think —unless these folks get wise."

Mr. Chor tried to conceal his gnawing avarice. A little too casually he asked:

"How many shares do they have?"

"About a lakh," said Peter, referring to the peculiar Hindu measure for one hundred thousand. Mr. Chor whistled softly.

"I have to put up nearly two lakhs of chips?"

"For hardly a day."

"A lot of rupees."

Ragland shrugged.

"So Jahveri said you're a wealthy man. Of course if you aren't, I'm wasting my time." He glance'd toward his hat on the desk.

"Damn Jahveri!" The Madrasi's eyes bored Ragland. "Who are these people?"

It was really outrageous the picture Ragland painted of them. Perhaps he did not lie outright. Somehow Lorna Grey's name came out Miss Black. But is not black merely a deeper shade of grey? And is not one orphaned when only the father is dead? As for her being a half-breed, it was perfectly true; most Americans are. She had eight hundred shares, she was stony. True again.

Of the scatter-brained woman named Hackett whose late husband "had stayed on in India" hoping his unwise investments might some day pay out, could Ragland be blamed for Mr. Chor's impression

that she was an English colonial?

"A widow?" The pink tip of Mr. Chor's tongue peeked out, and again Ragland knew just what Jahveri had meant.

"A very poor widow," he said honestly. "But she has the big slice —a hundred thousand shares."

Mr. Chor did not really rub his hands.

"So we go after her first."

In this fallible world, there are lamentably few true perfectionists. But of these, Peter Ragland was one. While confident that Mr. Chor's cupidity had overwhelmed Mr. Chor's doubt, he meant to be very sure. He said: "No-o, we wouldn't want to dump so many shares right off." He said: "My own shares sold at four." He said: "So let's use the girl's eight hundred to nudge up the price for the kill."

Grudgingly, Sarnar Chor agreed that this plan made sense. His estimate of Ragland rose. It rose even higher when Ragland demanded a flat third of all profit. Mr. Chor had no idea of paying so much, but only a fool fails to bargain. Mr. Chor started low. They haggled. Finally they settled for twenty percent. They put it in writing; a paper, Ragland suspected, not worth its ink under Indian law.

Lorna Grey, alias Barbara Black, looked the typical Anglo-Indian—pretty but plainly dressed—when Ragland and the perspiring Chor climbed the four flights to her dreary, windowless lodging next morning. The place was in the dismal mill section of North Bombay; and the meager furnishings, limned by a weak electric bulb in the ceiling, spelled relentless poverty.

"Ah, you again?" said Lorna. She left the door open and turned back to a small stove where a curry of rice was cooking. Over her shoulder she flung: "I am still not giving you an option, mister."

Ragland winked at Chor.

"It's not an option we want this time, Miss Black. This is Mr. Chor. He's prepared to buy for cash."

Lorne turned off the gas, moved the pot to a table, and turned around. By a trick of makeup she had managed a drawn and hungry look.

"Oh?" With caution. "How much can I get?"

Ragland spoke quickly.

"Two chips, I'd think. Can we see the stock?"

As she crossed the room to kneel at a battered tin trunk, Sarnar Chor glared at Ragland. Plainly, having seen the girl's utter poverty, he'd expected to pay far less. She returned in a moment, squinting at a

creased and faded certificate. Her lips moved as she read the large type.

"It says two rupees all right," she assented slowly. "I guess that's what Pater paid."

"And you're lucky to get it back," Ragland assured her. But Lorna pursed her lips.

"I'm not so sure. It does seem—I mean, holding it all this time—there should be some profit. That is, if it's worth anything. No. I want three at least."

She was insistent. She turned back to her work. Only when Chor marched to the door did she finally accept two and a quarter—a total of Rs. 1800.

Sarnar Chor was fuming as they reached the street. Only a blundering idiot would have offered so much right off. Hereafter, damn it, he'd handle the thing himself. Which was exactly how Ragland had written the script: it so neatly switched the responsibility for bilking Mr. C. onto Mr. C. himself.

Lorna's shares sold by telegraph that afternoon at an asking price of five. In the argot with which Mr. Chor was doubtless familiar, but to which burgeoning greed benumbed him, he had been given the Old Convincer. He had seen Ragland take a profit; he had made a fine profit himself. And when Ragland appeared at his office next morning, by all the rules of the game he should have been counting out of his fat vault some Rs. 200,000 to thrust eagerly upon the Widow Grey in return for her worthless stock. But he wasn't.

Too often in human affairs an untoward Fate pops up to deter the reaching hand. Mr. Chor had, Mr. Chor glumly announced, just come from his astrologer.

The sensation Ragland experienced was of being suddenly kicked by a vicious horse. In this mystic land where he well knew that even Oxford-educated cabinet ministers guide their deeds by the planets, it was the one hitch which his Occidental mind had treacherously failed to anticipate. Worse, while one can persuade a horse to better manners, in all Asia one does not argue with the zodiac. With a supreme effort, Ragland maintained aplomb.

Mr. Chor was, Mr. Chor ruefully proceeded, a Leo. Today was Thursday, the 4th of November. The Sun was in conjunction with Saturn. Ergo, as his astrologer had firmly explained, it was a day to beware of trickery that could cost Mr. Chor dearly.

"But," resumed Chor more cheerfully, "we will see if the lady won't sign over the stock on our promise

to pay tomorrow."

"Why tomorrow?"

"Venus trines Uranus. It is more auspicious." Mr. Chor smiled slyly. "Also, I think it more wise to sell her stock first."

Ragland submitted, with all due respect to the heavens, that Mrs. Hackett mightn't accept a mere promise, the more especially since she'd already refused his own cash option. Mr. Chor retorted that Ragland, perhaps, was not so adept as himself at the gentle art of inducement.

A distant squall the preceding night had kicked up the Arabian Sea and now, under Bombay's serene blue sky, a white and angry surf pounded the Western seawall. But its geysers of spray were no more turbulent than Ragland's thoughts as, reluctantly, he directed Mr. Chor in Mr. Chor's Daimler along Marine Drive to Chaupati Sea Face. With Chor at his elbow, he knew, it would be impossible by word or sign to warn the Widow Grey of this sudden twist in the plot. And without such warning, Agatha Grey would undoubtedly fall into Mr. Chor's trap.

Nearing Malabar Hill they turned into Babul Nath Road and shortly drew up before a house scarred by the look of genteel poverty. A long wait attended Ragland's knock; then, like a small explosion, the door flew open and a big-shouldered young man ran out and smacked into Peter.

"Umph—sorry, old chap, sorry," he cried excitedly. Racing into the street, he leaped into a small Austin and sped away. At the same moment Agatha Hackett Grey appeared.

Her blonde hair had magically turned auburn; she had doffed her smart frock for a dress stylish just before the war; her make-up was slap-dash. Gushing a bright welcome, she led the visitors to the parlor of a small flat. It was so nice to see. Mr. Ragland again. And this was his friend? Mr. Chor? What a nice name! She knew just why they were there. Wasn't it wonderful? If only dear Charlie were here—"My husband, you know. He had such faith in that stock—Bangkok Sapphire, wasn't it? No-no, that's hardly right—"

Mr. Chor's smile turned the least bit acid.

"Rangoon Ruby," he corrected.

"Of course!" Agatha exclaimed. "How stupid of me. And here I've tried to sell it simply everywhere after poor Charlie died. I'm so hopelessly silly about business."

Sarnar Chor settled himself in a chair.

"Well, now," he said indulgently, "it's just possible I may make an of-

fer. What d'ya think you want?"

Agatha's hands fluttered, her eyelids fluttered.

"You know," she confessed slowly, "I haven't the faintest idea. Perhaps I should get them out." She fluttered toward the next room, but at the door she stopped and turned innocently.

"There was a young man just here from Delhi. Or was it Calcutta? Why of course! You must have run into him. Seeing's believing, I always think, but he did say he'd give three rupees."

She was gone then, and Mr. Chor was staring after her with a more splendid stupefaction than even Ragland had dared to expect.

"Damn you!" he blazed. "You said we could get it for under two!"

She was back in a moment, holding a tin box from which she produced the certificates and spread them on a table. Mr. Chor lazily got up and examined them. Yes. Hmm. Ah. Well, they *seemed* in order. Perhaps, yes, he might go to three rupees, two annas. But there were considerations. Appraisal. Solicitors. If he could just take them along. A day only—"

"Oh," breathed Agatha, at once sensing something wrong. "Well," she said, fingering the tin box. "I don't see," she observed cautiously, "that this is much different than the option Mr. Ragland offered. Except Mr. Ragland did offer me a little money—"

Covertly, concealing her tension, she searched Ragland's face for some clue. But no clue came.

Never, to twist the phrase, underestimate the invention of a woman. Agatha Grey née Hackett, with her talent for gaucherie, suddenly dropped the tin box. It landed on Mr. Chor's left foot, and three things happened: Mr. Chor yipped, he reached down, and in that second Ragland shook his head. As Mr. Chor came up with the box, Ragland said easily:

"The thing is, Mrs. Hackett, Mr. Chor is a Leo and this just isn't his day. But tomorrow—"

She was simply marvelous.

"How utterly thrilling! Of course I understand. I'm a Taurus myself. And do you know what my horoscope says for today? That I'm not to believe promises. Now isn't that frightful?" She looked Sarnar Chor straight in the eye. "And of course that's what I told that nice young man."

Mr. Chor appeared puzzled. His set smile began to fade.

"And do you know what he said? That he'd go right out and bring back cash!"

Mr. Chor's smile vanished altogether. He glanced once at those in-

viting certificates, then reached for his hat, clamped it on his head, grabbed Ragland by the arm and propelled him to the door.

"Damn that astrologer!" he bellowed. "Quick! We'll beat that young poacher yet!"

Chief of Detectives Jahveri, if a bit surprised, was also pleased to be included in the gay little going-away party which Peter Ragland held that night in his rooms at the Taj Mahal. He sipped with relish the champagne which, in Bombay, is forbidden the natives but permitted to foreigners. And he found Lorna and Agatha Grey, and even the quiet Joseph, really quite charming —for Americans.

If he thought it odd that the Grays had suddenly acquired the means for the long trip home and that Ragland would travel with them as far as Cairo, he reserved comment.

But one story he did not hear was of the wild race in Mr. Chor's Daimler to Churchgate Street, of the quick withdrawal from Mr. Chor's vault of the rupee equivalent of $72,000, and of the wild race back to Agatha's flat.

It was not mentioned that Peter Ragland got back his original two thousand dollar stake, or that he'd arranged for the forwarding of the Greys' circus gear. Nor, somehow, did it come out that the chief detective's welcome presence was conveniently keeping an apoplectic Sarnar Chor at a cautious distance.

Mr. Chor was, indeed, lurking darkly about the lobby when at midnight the revelers came down to board a taxi for Santa Cruz Airport. From the grim smile on his face, there was little doubt of what had happened when he'd tried to unload one hundred thousand shares of Rangoon Ruby upon a reluctant Calcutta market.

Not till they were crossing the ramp toward the huge B.O.A.C. air liner did Jahvari get the buoyant Ragland alone for a moment.

"Jolly abrupt, y'know, your nipping off like this. D'ya wish to explain?"

Ragland glanced at his watch, one of those handsome Swiss chronographs which supply all manner of astronomical data. Then, as if to confirm his reading, he peered up at the great indigo dome of the Indian sky where, all in their proper positions, the stars glittered..

"I don't guess you care," he replied, "but it's November Fifth now, and up there Venus is trining Uranus. It's most auspicious for travel."

"You believe that nonsense?" Jahveri growled. Ragland grinned.

"Just call me Leo," he said.

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# THE GIRL IN THE MIST

## by WYATT BLASSINGAME

The fog was rising, stirred by a slow wind, with now and then flecks of blue sky showing through. Beneath the fog the surface of the bay was visible for fifty feet on any side, a small gray world that inclosed the boat and the man in it. Sitting in the stern Joe Falls saw the dead pelican and a minute later a dead gull. Then there was another, an injured one that tried desperately to fly but could lift only one wing.

Falls slowed his boat. The bird was a laughing gull in early summer plumage: soft white on the breast and tail feathers, the head and throat a shiny black. Its red-rimmed eye watched Falls in terror, its red-tipped beak struck wildly at him as he leaned over and lifted it from the water. A wing hung grotesquely.

"It's been shot," Falls said in amazement. "Now why in hell would anybody—?" The birds were not edible; they were practically tame. Anyone who shot them could do it only for the pleasure of killing, and thinking this, looking down at the wounded bird, Falls felt a sudden anger swell in his throat. He was short, squarely built man with flame colored hair and a hair triggered temper—the temper used chiefly to conceal his natural sentimentality, especially from himself.

So the quick sympathy he felt for the bird he converted hurriedly into anger at whoever had shot it. Protection of water birds was not part of his job as a Florida Salt Water Conservation Officer, *But if I find the guy*, he thought, *I can damn sure point out that shooting gulls is not considered sporting.*

He peered uptide into the fog, standing half raised on the balls of his feet, listening. From somewhere ahead came the sound of a gun. "Ah—" Falls said. Still holding the bird he stepped back to the motor and pushed the throttle open.

Minutes later he saw the cruiser, a big one with the anchor line slipping down from the bow into the water. There was a figure on the stern, amorphous and wavering in the mist, holding what might be a gun. A crooked grin came on Joe Falls' face then. He ran his boat alongside, cut the outboard, and threw his bowline to the cruiser's deck. "Hey there," he said.

The figure turned. And even as she came toward him, before she stooped and he could see her face through the mist, he knew it was a girl. She said, "Hello," and then noticing Falls' uniform, "Hello, Officer." She stuck the fishing rod she was holding into a mount on the stern and took his bowline and made it fast.

For a moment Falls forgot his anger. The girl wore dungarees and a white shirt open at the throat. Her hair was dark, damp with the fog, and curled close about her head. He had never seen her before but it occurred to him, even in that first moment, that he would like to see her again. Then the bird stirred in his hand and his anger came back. He said, "Who's the Daniel Boone you got on board?"

"I beg your pardon?"

He climbed to the cruiser's deck and held the bird toward her. The torn wing hung over the side of his hand. "Somebody here been shooting these?"

"It's hurt!" the girl said. She made a quick, instinctive gesture to touch it and the bird struck at her with its beak.

"Those things can be vicious," the man said. He had come quietly aft from the cabin, a big man with dark hair and a darkly handsome face who moved through the fog like a cat that has heard a mouse and is waiting to hear it again. Beneath the sleeves of his white T shirt his arms were brown and heavily muscled. "You looking for somebody, warden?"

"That's right," Falls said. "I'm looking for the sportsman—" he put emphasis on the word—"who's

shooting seagulls in a wildlife refuge."

The man looked at the gull and then at Falls, at the wide brimmed hat set cockily on the side of his head, the green shoulder patch on the gray uniform. "Salt water conservation, aren't you, Warden? I thought birds were the job of the game commission." And then glancing over Falls' head at the sky, "Must have been good shooting in this fog. Only see them for a moment through the breaks."

"Good shooting at a gull?" Falls said. "You could hold up a piece of bread and they'd take it out of your fingers. You could shoot them with a slingshot."

"Perhaps." The man's face was as noncommital as the word. "Sorry I can't help you, Warden. I heard some shots, but it's impossible to tell where they came from in this fog." He shrugged and went past Falls, towering over him for a moment, to the stern and picked up the fishing rod.

The girl said, "Couldn't it have been hurt in some other way?"

"Sure," Falls said. "Maybe it bit itself." He stepped to the side of the boat and with a quick hammer-like bow struck the bird's head on the rail, then dropped it into the water.

"You killed it!"

Her eyes were wide and even through the mist he could tell they were blue, oddly blue against her sunburned skin and dark hair. Looking at her a kind of baffled fury he did not understand took hold of Joe Falls. "You wanted it to starve or bleed to death?" She did not answer and he said, "As your husband remarked, birds are the job of the game commission. I deal with fish." He stepped past her to the fishbox and raised the lid. Inside were three mackerel and a trout, the trout well under the twelve inch legal minimum.

Joe Falls measured it with great deliberation. He put the tape back in his pocket, took out his warning and arrest books. He pushed the big hat even farther to the side of his head, looking like a bantam rooster about to crow. "Your name?" he said happily to the man.

"Jay Cain. Why?"

The girl said, "I was the one caught the fish, Officer. It was—"

"I don't care which one of you caught it." Still looking at the man he asked, "The boat registered in your name?"

"It's in my father's name," the girl said. "Jay's a guest aboard, not my husband."

"Oh. . . ." Falls said. He felt a sudden sense of almost absurd pleasure, mingled with anger at the

man and fear that he had made a fool of himself. But there was nothing to do except go ahead and write the ticket. Her name was Nancy Robbins; she lived on the *Simon Bolivar* which has its home port in New Orleans but was anchoring at the Anna Maria Yacht Basin.

The fog was thinning when he got into his boat and started the motor. Looking back he could see for a moment the oval shape of the girl's face, the dark hair. Then there was just the outline of the cruiser and the two figures on deck, dim in the mist. He saw Jay Cain lift one big arm and put it casually around the girl's shoulders.

"To hell with them," Joe Falls said, and tried to tell himself that his anger was because of the bird and nothing else.

The bartender at the Yacht Basin said, "Her father's some kind of professor. He writes books about Latin American history, or something like that. Supposed to be quite a big shot." He put the beer in front of Joe Falls. "I think they're going down that way soon."

Falls stopped the glass half way to his mouth. "When?"

"I don't know. A few days."

"What about this guy Jay Cain? Is he with them?"

"It depends on what you mean," the bartender said. "He showed up here about a month ago, staying with Pete Toldorf at the boat works. He was talking about buying a boat, but I ain't ever found out if it was a pleasure boat or a shrimper or what. Looked like he was interested in anything big enough to go out in the gulf. And talked like he had money. But since the professor and his daughter got here Cain's been spending all his time hanging around the *Bolivar*." He grinned. "Not that I blame him."

"He's a bum," Falls said. "A pelican hunter."

The grin left the bartender's face. "I wouldn't know. I just know he doesn't look like a man I'd want any trouble with."

"A bum," Falls said again. He swallowed the last of his beer and went out.

A moon that was just short of being full and bright-eyed as a coon, swung in the top of a coconut palm. It put gold tinted ripples on the water. A dozen boats, most of them fishermen, were tied along the dock. The *Simon Bolivar* was at the far end. There were lights in the cabin and the sound of a typewriter and through a porthole Falls could see the girl. She was washing dishes in the galley sink. She wore a white dress and a flowered apron and she looked very pretty. There was no sign of Jay Cain.

Falls stepped on deck; the cabin door was open. "You need any help?" he said.

She turned. Oh. Hello, Officer."

He told her his name was Joe Falls and then stood there, feeling strangely awkward as though he had never spoken to a pretty girl before, or rather as if there were something different about this one he did not yet understand. And because any feeling of inadequacy always made Falls angry, he said harshly, "I wanted to tell you about that ticket. It was just a warning; there's no fine or court appearance connected with it."

"I know. And normally I wouldn't have kept undersized fish. But that one—"

"Had been hooked in the eye and would have died anyway," Falls said. "I could see that. My temper's always causing me trouble and that guy with you got me mad and—" He stopped and said, "He did shoot those gulls, didn't he?"

"I don't know. He'd been doing some shooting on the bow. I thought it was at cans he'd thrown overboard."

"He shot the birds," Falls said. And then, "Anyway, I wanted to apologize to you."

"Is that why you came?"

She was smiling and suddenly he felt at ease. "That's part of the reason. And it was an excuse."

The door to the next cabin opened and her father came out. He was a tall thin man with glasses. "Oh hello," he said. "I thought I heard Jay."

"Joe, not Jay," Nancy said. She introduced them and they went outside and sat in deck chairs and drank beer. There was a faint smell of the water. Somebody was giving a party on a nearby boat and there was the sound of laughter and phonograph music. The moon climbed higher and the professor said he had to go back to work. He was preparing a series of lectures on Santa Marican history to be given at the university there.

"That must be a lot of history," Falls said, "if you have to keep up with all the revolutions they've had."

"The age old struggle for freedom," the professor said. He stood up, holding his glasses in his hand. "President Fernandez is popular with most of the people. He has given them the closest thing to real democracy in his part of the world. Of course there are those who don't want that."

He went back to his cabin and soon there was the click of the typewriter again. "A nice guy," Joe Falls said. "Does he like to fish, or does he just write history?"

Nancy laughed. "He's the most passionate fisherman since Issak Walton. He wasn't with us this morning because he had to go into town for some books he'd ordered."

"Tomorrow's my day off," Falls said. "And the kingfish are beginning to show up. If you—"

"Dad's already talked to Jay about going. Won't you come with us?"

He dropped his can over the side. "No thanks. I might accidentally hook a plug in the back of Mr. Cain's neck."

Usually he slept late when he had the chance, but this morning he woke early. He thought of going fishing alone; he thought of a half dozen girls he might call to go with him; he thought of going up to Tampa for the day. And at ten that morning he was driving moodily past the Yacht Basin and looking at the empty slip where the *Bolivar* had been the night before.

He parked and walked along the wharf. He talked to a half dozen boatmen. A two hundred pound shark hung at the foot of the dock. "Looks like my friend Mr. Cain," Falls said half aloud. "About the same size too." He went in the bar and ordered beer and left it and went out and stood on the bridge across the canal. He was standing there five minutes later when he saw Nancy come out of the grocery, her arms filled with bundles. And all at once the day seemed much better.

"We were leaving the dock this morning," she told him as he took the bundles from her, "and Jay backed the *Bolivar* into a piling. It sprang a leak around the rudder board, so now it has to be on the ways for a day or two and Dad and I have moved to a motel."

"You mean Handsome is better at shooting tame birds than running a boat?"

She laughed. "Actually Jay's an excellent boatman. But the gears got jammed, or something. We're lucky it happened here, before we left for Santa Marica."

He swung the car into traffic. "Isn't that quite a trip for just you and your father? Which of you is the navigator?"

"Neither of us is much good. But Jay's going with us. He's been there before. So he and dad get along fine talking about it."

Falls looked at her. "How do you get along with him?"

"He can be very charming." She hesitated and said, "He really can. And I've never seen him when he wasn't—nice. But there are times—like yesterday—when I'm almost afraid of him. That's silly, of course."

"Maybe," Falls said. "How'd you happen to get him?"

Well, we needed someone to help us. Dad hired a sailor while we were still in New Orleans, but a few days after we got here he quit. Then we thought we had another man, but he changed his mind. By then Dad had already met Jay—and he's really very good with boats."

"Like this morning?" Falls said. But now sitting beside the girl he knew he did not want to think any more about Jay Cain. They were driving along the island's one street. On their left the gulf was blue and placid. The sun was bright. A light wind stirred the palms and the Australian pines. He said, "When do y'all leave?"

"When the boat's ready. A day or two."

"Well," Joe Falls said, "I still have the day off. And you couldn't find a better guide if you'd like to see our local sights."

They went in Falls' boat to Bird Island, a thin spit of grass-grown sand in the mouth of the bay. The gulls and terns were nesting here by the thousands; they circled and screamed overhead. They dived close and whirled away again. The grass was a labyrinth of tunnels with nests opening like rooms to right and left. "A regular maternity hospital," Nancy said, laughing. "Though with no numbers on the doors I don't know how any mother knows her own room."

They went to Fort Dade and looked at the ancient gun emplacements. "For protection, in case the Spanish tried to take Tampa in 1898," Falls said. "Another of the revolutions your father has to keep up with."

Nancy said, "He's an anti-revolutionist—and not only because it makes his history easier. I guess that's why they've asked him to lecture in Santa Marica."

On Mullet Key they had lunch in a hotel that looked like a barn and served excellent food. They swam for awhile and lay in the sun and dressed again. "Come on," Falls said. I've got something I want to show you."

They took the boat, threading their way among dozens of tiny mangrove islands. A half mile to the east the tremendous Skyway bridge glittered in the late afternoon sunlight. "Over there," Falls said. As she looked a cloud of pure color suddenly lifted above one of the islands; it swirled and dropped and appeared again. "Roseate spoonbills," Falls said. "One of the last places they can still be found."

He took her ashore on an island where pelicans were nesting, the

babies pure white and big as adult birds. The young pelicans made horrible gawking noises and spit at them as they passed. "Their looks are better than their manners," Nancy said, laughing.

"It's their means of protection."

When she looked at him there was a softness in her face. "You love these things, don't you—the birds and the water."

He was instantly defensive. "Hell, it's just—" and stopped. "Yes," he said. "I guess I do."

And then because they were standing close together under the mangroves and somehow it seemed the natural thing to do, he put his hands on her shoulders and kissed her. It was not a long kiss. He stepped back and she said, "I'm going to miss you, Joe Falls."

"You're not going to stay in Santa Marica. You'll be back here?"

"I don't know," she said, and waded out to the boat.

The professor was standing in the yard of the motel watching the last of the sunset when they arrived. "Jay tells me the boat isn't as badly damaged as we thought," he said to Nancy. "We should be able to get away tomorrow."

Nancy did not answer and Falls said, "When will you come back, Sir? You will come this way, won't you?"

"We may go back up the Mexican coast." His mind was obviously on something else. He said, "I have some typing I want you to do for me tonight, Nancy. I'd like to mail that revised chapter to the publisher before we leave in the morning."

Falls drove slowly to the mainland. He cooked his own dinner and washed the dishes and sat down with a magazine, the words of which made no sense to him. He kept thinking of how blue Nancy's eyes were against her dark hair, and of the feel of her mouth. He thought of Jay Cain coming toward him through the fog across the deck of the boat. He thought of Nancy saying, "Dad hired a man in New Orleans but he quit after we got here. Then we thought we had another man and he quit too."

*Why?* Falls thought. *Why did both quit?* He stood up and began to walk back and forth across the room. He told himself he was being a fool. "So she's a good looking babe," he said aloud. "And so you fall half in love with her. So what?" He had told himself this on other occasions about other girls, but this time it didn't work.

Eventually he went to the phone and called the dock master at the Yacht Basin. "This fellow Cain who's taking Professor Robbins and

his daughter south tommorrow," he said. "What kind of boatman is he?"

"Damn good from the little I've seen. Of course this morning he did back into a piling like he was aiming for it. But I guess he was looking at the girl. Why?"

"I don't know," Falls said and hung up. He walked around the apartment some more; he cursed himself for an idiot—and went and got his car.

The Toldorf boatyard was on the island, not far from the motel where Nancy and her father were staying. There were Australian pines around it and under them, where Falls parked his car, it was very dark. But along the beach moonlight poured like water and he could see the boathouse and the pale outline of half a dozen boats. On the main ways, lifted clear of the water, was the *Simon Bolivar.*

He made his way across the yard, between the smaller boats, wondering what he would say if Toldorf should surprise him here. His association with the boat builder had not been friendly: twice in past years he had found truck loads of mullet stored here during closed season.

There was no sound except the faint crackle of sand and wood shavings under his feet, the soft slapping of water at the beach. Then a night heron cried hoarsely and Falls jumped—and was immediately angry at himself for being startled.

Standing in the shadow of the *Bolivar* he took a flashlight and examined the rudder and rudder-bar. There was no sign of damage, or of repairs. He frowned and put the light in his pocket again and climbed onto the boat.

The cabin door was open, a black hole in the moonlight. He stepped inside and took out the flashlight. Its beam flashed across wooden decking and into space and he said, "What—"

The overhead light came on. Jay Cain said, "You looking for small fish, Warden?" He wore dark trousers and a dark T shirt, both grease stained. There were grease and sweat stains on his face and arms. He held the gun like a man who knew how to use it. "Close that cabin door, Toldorf."

The boat builder was back of Falls. He closed the door, said, "It's Joe Falls, a—"

"I've met him," Cain said. And to Falls, "Miss Robbins isn't here, if you're looking for her."

"I was looking for the reason you backed into that piling," Falls said. He could feel the fear like indigestion in his chest, and then the

anger at himself for feeling it. So he swaggered as he walked across the cabin to where the decking had been removed and bent and flashed his light downward. There were boxes, only partially lashed in place, with printing on them.

"Machine guns," Falls said. He was looking at Jay Cain now. His mouth was dry and he talked to prove to the others, to himself that it wasn't. "So that's why an old boatman like you rammed a piling. You needed Nancy and her father off the boat and the boat on the ways so you could hide the guns. And I guess that's why those men the professor hired to take them to Santa Marica quit; you bought them off so you could be aboard with the guns."

"So?" Cain said. The muzzle of his gun still sloped toward the deck but his dark eyes never left Falls' face. He said, "What's the chance somebody would hear a shot, Toldorf?"

"There ain't much wind to cover it."

"No," Cain said. "Then get that crow bar and cover the door. We'll do this the quiet way."

The boat builder said, "I don't want—"

"It's too late to worry about what you want," Cain said. "I've got fifty thousand dollars in those guns and twice that in profit when I put 'em ashore. No fish warden is going to stop me." He moved then, slowly, the way a panther moves toward its kill. His left hand was held open, waist high, in front of him. His right hand had brought the gun up and back.

And Joe Falls said, "Come on, bird-killer." The grin on his face was strained. His red head was lifted like a flag. He said, 'We'll have a little revolution here all our own." He heard himself talking and thought, *It's because I'm afraid of the bastard. I'm not afraid of the bastard,* and couldn't stop.

It was Toldorf who heard the steps. He said, "Wait!"

The cabin door opened and Nancy came in. She said, "Joe. I thought I heard your voice. What —" Then she saw Cain and the gun in his hand and her voice stopped.

Falls said, "Your friend isn't satisfied with shooting seagulls. He wants to start a whole revolution."

"What do you mean? Jay, what's that gun for?"

"Guns," Falls said. "Machine guns." He jerked his thumb at the open decking. "For Santa Marica. I suppose he'd had trouble getting hold of a boat. Or maybe the government down there had some notice of what was up and is being pretty careful of what boats come

in and out. But your father's a friend. He's been invited down. Nobody is going to search his boat. That's why—"

"Shut up," Cain said. He was thinking hard. He said, "Go up to that motel, Toldorf, and tell the professor I want to see him, now. When we get him here you go back and bring his gear. He was leaving tomorrow anyway, and people leave motels early. If he's gone in the morning nobody will notice it."

"Look," Toldorf said, "I don't mind a few guns. But I don't want—"

"There won't be any trouble. Get the professor."

Toldorf left. Falls and the girl and Jay Cain stood there in the cabin with its open decking and the glare of a single overhead light on them. "We'll do this sensibly," Cain said. "If all of you will be sensible, nobody gets hurt."

At least not here, Falls thought. But once the *Bolivar* was at sea and the sound of a gun could not be heard. . . . Then in Santa Marica Cain could run his machine guns ashore on some hidden beach; or he could take them straight into the capital with some cooked up story that Professor Robbins had been delayed for a few days. And in a few days his guns would be ashore and the government would have changed hands. *So it's got to be here,* he thought, and looked at the girl, and his throat hurt.

She said, "What's going to happen, Joe?"

The grin was still stiff on his face. "Nothing," he said. "Except I'm going to take this guy right here. You go and tell your father to phone the cops to come and get him."

"Shut up," Cain said.

"Go on," Falls said. "He won't shoot. He won't take a chance of having half the island—" And then he knew he was wrong. He saw it in Cain's eyes, in the way he moved to block Nancy from the door. He knew Cain was going to shoot, now or later when they were at sea.

"Look!" Falls said and raised his flashlight and pointed at the overhead. "Up there."

"Try another trick," Cain said. "That one's too old."

"How's this?" Fall said. His arm was already raised, the elbow bent. He threw the flashlight straight at Cain's head.

Cain moved, fast. The light glanced off his cheek. Then Falls struck him across the knees and they were rolling on the deck and Falls felt the jar of the gun as it struck him on the shoulder. It hit him on the side of the head and lights whirled back of his eyes. He

groped for Cain's wrist and his hand slipped and the gun hit him again. But this time it was not a hard blow and he saw the gun sliding across the deck and grabbed for it and rolled to his knees.

Blood was coming from a cut on his forehead into his eyes and he was dizzy but he could still see. Nancy was standing over Cain, a piece of decking raised in both hands. "You don't need to hit him again," Falls said. "The bum's cold."

She turned, still holding the plank in her hands. "Dad? That other man?"

"Toldorf will take one look at this," Falls said, balancing the gun in his hand, "and be a lamb. But I hope our bird hunter there can make one more move. I want an excuse to slap him with his own gun."

Later she said, "I had to get some paper for Dad's manuscript. That's why I walked over to the boat. If I hadn't—"

"I could have taken that bum with one hand," Falls said. "I—" He stopped. "The truth is," he said, "I'd probably have gone south with you, packaged away with the guns." They were on the gulf side of the island now, in front of her motel. The police had come and gone; the professor had finally retired once more to his room. The moon rode big and silver over the water.

"Speaking of that trip south," Joe Falls said, "you're going to need a new navigator. And I have a vacation coming. And if I had two weeks in which to tell you about this part of the country, I might sell you on coming back here, to stay."

"You might," she said. "I think you might."

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Law was a computing machine.

It fed in certain facts, tabulated and evaluated them, and the decision came out. Irrevocable. Inevitable. If the Law said: *this man is a murderer, his continued existence is a threat to others*, then that man deserved the final punishment.

Warden Kress believed and conceived the Law with precisely that imagery. In fifteen years as warden of the penitentiary he had lived by that logic. The Law had its way every time; there was no skirting it, no challenging it, no hiding from it. He felt a sympathy for his charges, for he was not an unemotional man, but his sympathy was like a rose encased in ice. He had been fooled only once by a prisoner.

One time, and the man had killed two guards before they had cut him down with the South Tower machine gun.

Warden Kress would not be fooled again.

If a man was in the death cell, the "squirrel cage" where condemned prisoners were taken the night before their execution day, it was foregone that the man was guilty.

Yet for a week he had known Johnny Macklin was innocent. Innocent of the degree of murder with which he had been charged. Guilty

perhaps of taking another man's life, but not as guilty as the jury had decided.

His had been a crime of honor. An honor there was no need to die for. But he was a man on a treadmill, doomed to walk till he dropped, with no way off.

Johnny Macklin wanted to die, and no matter what the warden knew, if the boy would not cooperate, he would be strapped in as surely as a man who had slaughtered a thousand.

Until the afternoon the warden had talked with the girl, Beth, he had believed Johnny Macklin was going to get lightning crashing through his body for a crime he had committed with sanity and premeditation.

Then the girl had come.

She had been clean-looking. That was the first thing that impressed him. That and the resemblance to the boy in the squirrel cage. She had looked like a pastel-fresh college girl, her legs firm and shiny as a young girl's legs should be.

And she had come to his office, with the sunlight streaming through the bars in broken strips, and she had looked at him with her freckled face, her eyes so blue they might have been filmed, and in a soft voice she had said:

"Warden, I'm a whore."

That had been the beginning of his nightmare. That had been when Warden Kress had learned that the Law was inexorable, occasionally erroneously so. That had been when he had learned the story behind the nameless boy they had named Johnny Macklin.

Now—on a night like any other night, save that a blue-eyed, freckled boy of nineteen would die the next day—Warden Kress had to go across the snow-covered prison yard, and hear a last request.

A last request from a man who shoud not be dying the next day.

They had called him in his home within the walls: Johnny Macklin had a last request. Warden Kress was gnawingly frightened.

He replaced the receiver in its cradle. The guard's voice still echoed in his mind. "Warden, this is Tanley at the squirrel cage. Macklin says he wants to talk to you. Last request. He wouldn't tell me, and he's making a thing out of it. You want to come over and talk to him?"

He swung his legs from under the covers, making no attempt to stifle the bed's movement. If Connie wakened, well, he could do with a cup of coffee . . . she didn't seem to be overworking herself these days. But that was another, very different, problem—

She continued sleeping, turned on her side, huddled against the seeping chill of the January night outside the house. He opened the closet and pulled out a pair of slacks, a jacket. He put them on over his pajamas, shaking his arms so the bunched-up sleeves would slip down inside the jacket. Then shoes, and he was ready for the walk across the yard.

When he opened the door, the wind caught at his thin grey hair and blew it about his head like a halo. There were men in the endless cell blocks who would have agreed the warden did not deserve a halo. A tail and horns, perhaps, when they had been in solitary for a few days, but a halo never.

Once, as he crossed the yard, the great scythe-swath of the searchlights cruised over him, a moving line of black against the fierce cleanliness of the snow. Behind him, like a path through life, his footprints dogged him.

Johnny Macklin was a *Saturday Evening Post* image of the clean-cut American lad. His face was round and outspoken as a clock and the light skin was dotted freely with freckles. He had high cheekbones, off which the harsh overhead light cast a shine, and his eyes were clear, blue, honest. He had a pug Irish nose and a strong mouth; his chin was a shade on what might have been called the weak side.

He sat on the trough bed, clasping and unclasping his hands, staring through the bars at the short corridor leading outside.

The squirrel cage was in a building by itself, its only function to house the condemned man on the eve of his execution. It was standard procedure to remove a prisoner from his cell in death row the day before the execution, and take him to the squirrel cage. That way his fellow inmates did not have to see him dragged out at the crucial time, screaming, crying, pleading, sometimes vomiting. It was a cell within short walking distance of the chair, and made it easier for the prisoner; a more humane way of making the journey on the last day.

Warden Kress stood just inside the barred door, having sent the guard, Tanley, out for a smoke. The guard had hesitated for a moment when the warden had ordered him out, had started to object. But the look in the warden's eyes was assurance enough that of all the prisoners, Johnny Macklin would not try anything. The guards trusted the warden. During his fifteen years as the iron hand that ruled the prison they had seen him in quite a few awkward—even dangerous—

situations, and they respected his judgment of prisoners.

The two men stared at each other.

Warden Kress found himself angry and annoyed at this man who was about to die. He knew that part, at least, of what Johnny Macklin would say in a few moments would be lies. He had heard the real truth from Macklin's sister, Beth. *Why* was the boy damning himself? He answered his own question instantly. *Honor*, of course; there was an honor in this death, and it was not his place to do anything about it, unless the boy cooperated.

"Well, there, Macklin," he said.

He was precise, but not offensively hearty. Yet it was not a mausoleum solemnity, and Johnny Macklin had known the man long enough to accept it for what it was.

He knew Warden Kress had an exact god, the Law, and what the man could do, he would do.

"Hi, Warden. Thanks for coming."

He added, as an afterthought, "Sorry to get you out of bed." The warden simply nodded. No nonsense. What do you want?

"Now . . ." Warden Kress sighed, prepared to hear the last request; something bizarre, something he would either approve or disapprove. It was always like this.

"I—I don't know how to start it, sir. I've got a request. I've been, been thinking about it a long—"

Warden Kress felt the tension in the boy. Emotion had clubbed him into silence. There was a hunger there, a something that left Macklin's slim body, climbed the walls and dripped down, soaking into the warden's own thoughts. What it was, he could not name.

"You know I never gave them my real name at the trial. I—I even made sure nobody took pictures of me, because I didn't want anyone back home to find out this had happened to me. Maybe some day they'll tie up a missing persons report with me, and know who I am, but right now—I come from a very wealthy family, Warden. Don't try to find out who I am, because I've come a helluva long way and taken a lot of care to cover my tracks."

*Warden, I'm a whore.*

"My mother died when I was young, very young. She had cancer of the breast, and they couldn't even arrest it; she was that far gone. So my father had to raise me and my sister, Beth. He did a lousy job, Warden."

*My brother is protecting me, Warden. I didn't come forward before this because . . . because of a lot of reasons. I'll be put in jail myself, as an accomplice, or withholding information, but that wasn't*

*why I didn't speak up when he came to trial. When he burst into that room at McHale's party, and saw me . . . saw us . . . he—he went crazy, Warden. He didn't, he* doesn't *know how I make my money. He killed that man to protect my honor, Warden. And he's going to let you electrocute him for the same reason. That's why I didn't speak up before this; it was his wish, that way, that he shouldn't die for nothing. He's shielding my name, Warden, and . . . and . . . there's nothing to shield.*

*I'm a whore. You can't let him die for a whore.*

"Don't get the idea that I'm moaning about my youth, because I'm not; he did the best he could, and he had a lot to do it with. He just didn't know kids, and he didn't know us most of all. Beth got pretty wild, and there wasn't anything much the old man could do about it. She ran off, and Dad put some private cops on her."

He stopped and wiped his mouth. Then it was that Warden Kress noticed the fine, white ridge of muscle on his upper lip. Whoever Johnny Macklin really was, at one time he had played the trumpet seriously; the tell-tale badge of the mouthpiece's pressure was still there. He was also aware that the boy was answering questions left unanswered at the trial. A trial that had become a *cause celebre*:

A nineteen-year old boy who had apparently never met his victim had stabbed a wealthy playboy to death with a seven-inch nail file in the man's own bedroom. There had been no question as to his guilt; reliable witnesses, over forty of them, had streamed in from the other rooms of the penthouse apartment where a party had been in progress, and had seen Johnny Macklin standing over the body. There had been no one else in the room, and the boy had confessed immediately.

*No, Warden, my brother isn't covering for me as far as the murder itself is concerned. He did it, but they wouldn't give him the chair if they knew why, would they?*

"Dad found out she had come here, to the city, and he tried to get her to come home, but she wouldn't." His voice assumed a deeper, less adolescent tone. "Beth and I have always been close, Warden. Real close. She was more family to me than my Dad ever could have been. I came to get her.

"I found out where she lived by reading the reports the private cops had sent through on her, and I tried to get her to come home. But she seemed so damned happy, she said she was busy and worth something for the first time in her life.

Not just a debutante, but a healthy, working *someone.* I believed her, and I was going back home; she invited me to come to this party before I went back, and I did."

*He'd always thought so, so highly of me, I suppose. I'm not ashamed of myself, Warden. I do what I want to do. I'm a free agent; but—but letting him die for a worthless cause . . . is it right?*

"That was where I met this McHale, the guy I stabbed. He was making passes at Beth. It got pretty bad; he was drunk. Then he took her into the bedroom. I heard her arguing with him; he was trying to —to make her."

*I begged Walt McHale not to get familiar with me while my brother was there. I—I thought he'd enjoy a nice party before he went home. I didn't know McHale would get drunk. I was supposed to stay the night with him. But he wouldn't wait, wouldn't let me alone. I begged him to wait till . . . till . . . Buddy had gone.*

"I guess I went a little screwy."

*Buddy burst in and grabbed the nail file off McHale's bureau.*

"I charged in there and belted him. Beth started begging me not to interfere, that I didn't understand; but I understood all right. That was when I picked up the—the thing I used on him. I wasn't thinking straight. All I could think of was he was ruining Beth. I was so damned mad, Warden, I just kept stabbing him."

*He didn't tell this at the trial because he wanted to protect me. He pushed me into the little bathroom adjoining McHale's bedroom, and when the room filled up with people from the party, I mingled with them. He begged me to let him handle it his way. I was a fool . . . I let him have his false honor. Can you . . . can you save him, Warden?*

Warden Kress stared at the boy, as memories of the girl faded from his mind. They had both been fools. She had been selfish, and had almost let the boy go to his death for nothing. It had been partially conscience on her part, and partially another kind of selfishness. The selfishness of being unable to live with her own guilt.

Could he save the boy?

He didn't know.

He didn't know if he *wanted* to save him. The Law had its way. But this was another case. This was the Law turning its guts inside out. The boy should not be put in the chair for his crime. He was guilty, of course, but not in degree. But he could do nothing unless the boy cooperated, unless he offered the information to the proper authorities

of his own volition.

The problem was deeper than right or wrong. The problem was philosophical and yet wholly material: Warden Kress realized the boy was dying for honor. Even if it was false honor, did he have the right to rob another human being of such an important treasure? Even to save his life? Was it his right to strip a man of all he had left, just to keep him alive? Was life worth anything when all the ideals are gone? Honor might be all Johnny Macklin had left when he sat in that chair.

"So you're going to get yourself electrocuted, just to save your sister's name. What a fool you are, Johnny. If that's your name."

"It's a name, Warden. It'll do."

"I still say you're a fool."

The boy turned to the little barred window, and stared out at the darkness and the whiteness. "That isn't why I asked for you tonight, Warden."

"I know. You've got a request. What is it?"

The boy Beth had called Buddy, the boy the Warden knew as Johnny Macklin bit his fist. He turned around and his eyes were swollen with tears. His voice came softly, and he stared at his hands. 'Have you ever realized you were nothing, Warden? Have you ever stopped and taken stock and said to yourself, 'I'm a nobody, and I've never really done anything.' It isn't very pleasant.

"I've always had all the money I ever wanted, and never really knew what to do with it. After a while loneliness gets to be a habit.

"You probably won't believe this, Warden, but I've never held a job. Oh, I've tried; I even took a civil service test once to be a mail clerk . . . and I flunked it. It's just that I'm worthless. I'm nothing. I've never really accomplished anything!"

Warden Kress was embarrassed, unable to answer. The boy spoke with such depth of feeling, such sincerity, there could be no doubting him. The boy was making his bid for self-esteem. He was dying to protect his sister's honor; dying for something that did not exist.

"Johnny, why don't you let me call the Governor. You can tell him all this. A new trial would be inevitable. We could get you—"

"No, Warden. I don't want that. I've got my reasons. I only told you all this so you might grant the favor I'm going to ask. But if you try to tell anyone what I've told you . . . I'll call you a liar."

Warden Kress felt very old. His concept of the Law had been rudely shattered in the past week, and

now he was assuming the role of priest and confesser. "What can I do for you, Johnny?"

Nineteen years became ninety years in the boy's face. "Warden, I told you I've never done anything, never really *been* anything. Hell, I can't even call myself a man; and that's what I want. I want to be a man, Warden. Before I die."

The older man felt it coming.

"Warden, I'm a virgin. I want a woman before I die."

Warden Kress felt the flesh about his mouth pull in and dry out. It was against all the rules. It was against all his personal beliefs. It was something he had denied many other men who had occupied this same cell; men with wives, men with hungers as great as Johnny Macklin's.

"No, Johnny. A flat-out *no!*"

They talked for a long time. Once Tanley, the guard, came in, saw they were still conversing, and went back to the generator shack to smoke another cigarette.

And somewhere during that time, it came to Warden Kress. It came to him that he could play God. That if he could rationalize taking the most valuable thing a man possessed —his honor—he could give Johnny Macklin what he wanted.

In a terrible, terrible way.

And he said: "Okay, Johnny. I'll get you a woman. But you've got to understand that the best I'll be able to find tonight is a prostitute. No nice girl is going to come to the prison. Do you understand what sort of girl I'll get you?"

*Here's my address, Warden. If you need me, you can find me here. I stay close to my phone. It's my business line.*

"I—I know what she'll be, Warden. But she'll be a woman, too. I won't ask for any more."

The Warden turned to leave. "And . . . and . . . *thanks,* Warden," Johnny Macklin stopped him. The Warden did not turn around as he replied, "You've got *nothing* to thank me for, Johnny.

"Nothing at all."

When they came off the Beltway, Warden Kress felt it was time to say a few things to her. She had sat there stolidly, as far from him as she could get on the other side of the car seat, the lights from the dashboard limning her attractive, youthful features.

"Miss-uh—Kindridge." He had learned her real name only a half hour before, when she had agreed to come with him. Beth Kindridge. Buddy Kindridge. Johnny Macklin. How did a family go so wrong, so young?

"He'll hate you."

She nodded slightly and there was a tenseness in her face. The warden had a melodramatic impression that this must have been the expression Joan d'Arc wore when they condemned her: one more torment added to all the others, what does it matter.

She fell silent after a few polite, mumbled conversational nothings. When they were driving across the nearly-flat countryside surrounding the prison, she turned on the seat, carefully placing her hand on her knee, keeping her skirt from rising, and said, "Warden, there's no need for you to feel awkward with me. I know what's going on, and I've known it for a long, long time. It took me a while to get that way, but I know where I am now, and where I'm going."

He stared straight ahead at the night-shrouded farmland that never really did its owners any financial good, for the soot of the city kept it arid. This was her speech, and he was already ill at ease.

"I was a clown to ever let Buddy talk me into keeping quiet. I suppose I did it more for myself than him, and whatever he thinks of me . . . I deserve. I'm really not very much, Warden."

Warden Kress heard her brother saying the same thing in his mind. What had their father been like? Was it the money . . . living high . . . or something deeper?

She turned back to the image of the countryside reflected in her window, and she said nothing more, even when they pulled through the prison gates.

Johnny Macklin was asleep when Warden Kress finally brought Beth Kindridge to her brother's cell. He lay on his stomach, one hand cradling his head, the other flung over the side of the bunk.

Warden Kress had taken careful precautions so that a minimum of people knew a woman was visiting the boy. He had kept her in his house until arrangements had been made, and she had worn one of his topcoats while crossing the yard.

Tanley was actually the only one who saw her, and Warden Kress trusted the man completely. He smuggled the girl in, and waved Tanley out.

Then the warden walked the girl down the corridor (once she stopped, put her hand on the wall for support, and closed her eyes, summoning strength from somewhere, then in a moment she went on). This girl who looked like a college sophomore. They stood a moment before the cell, and he heard her breath catch in her throat.

"He looks so young," she said softly.

"He won't get much older, I'm afraid," he answered her brutally.

He unlocked the barred door, and she entered. He re-locked the door, and called in to Johnny Macklin: "Macklin! Wake up! Here's your woman."

Then he stumped away down the corridor, quickly.

His hand was on the outer door's bolt when the girl screamed. His head came up like an alert animal's as she screamed again, more piercingly. Then the crying began.

It was in two throats.

Warden Kress raced back down the corridor and came to a shaking halt before the cell door. The girl was in tears, hysterical, moaning and rattling the barred door. "Let me . . . let me out!" she shrieked at him, "Let me *out* of here, please, Warden!"

He unlocked the door, and as she ran past him he saw the livid five-pronged welt on her cheek, the small line of blood that ran from a corner of her mouth where Johnny Macklin had struck her.

She slammed past him, ran down the corridor, through the door, and out into the snowy yard.

He could hear her crying outside.

He stared for a second at Johnny Macklin. The boy sat hunched over on the edge of his bunk, head in his hands, and tears pouring over his fingers, and roughly, in sleep-ragged tones he cried, over and over, "Oh God, Beth, Beth, Oh God, Jesus God . . ."

All light fled from the older man's eyes. He had done it; he did not yet know the answer, whether his conscience would allow him to live with it. He had taken all the honor from the dying of Johnny Macklin, stripped him like a dead fish, to the bone, and without soul or purpose. Whether it had been a wise choice, what the boy could make of his life now, would be something only time and Fate could decree.

But for now, Johnny Macklin would not die, and his honor was gone. Warden Kress felt a constriction in his throat.

*This is ridiculous,* he thought, staring at the hunched, moaning figure of a boy known as Johnny Macklin. *I've been at this prison fifteen years. They cry when they go down the corridor, but I don't cry. I* never *cried.*

Then he turned to the phone on the corridor wall. The line that was always kept open until the final instant, and crying, he said into the mouthpiece:

"This is Warden Kress. Let me speak to the governor, please."

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# GHOSTS

## by RANJEE SHAHANI

Ghosts! I have lived with nothing but ghosts! Let me tell you.

In India birthdays may or may not be celebrated by everyone; in our family, however, they passed altogether unnoticed. But, on my twelfth anniversary, my uncle, who happened to pay us a short visit, presented me with a small gun. I was so pleased with this gift that I even carried it to bed with me. At night, when the light in my room was put out, I seemed borne to a larger, fiercer world. Gun in hand, I found myself roaming in a dense jungle amid strange animals and birds of gorgeous plumage. And I shot—shot—to my heart's content.

I would rise betimes and go out with my gun into the extensive grounds that surrounded our quaint but magnificent house. Long lines of crows occupied the eaves, waiting, always waiting. For what? Perhaps to steal from the kitchen. Anyhow, they offered a tempting target. If you happen to know these featherly bandits—they are the same everywhere—you must have noticed the uncanny sense of danger they display. No sooner is a gun pointed at one than it takes to flight; and, worse, it warns other birds of your approach. Our cook, an ageless woman, half Arab, half Negress, versed in magic lore, had told me

that the rascals live to be a hundred. "I wonder why Allah is so kind to them!" she would say, spitting disgustedly. "Shoot them! Shoot them! I hate the very sight of them!"

I thought I would test their longevity. If Allah had truly alloted them such long lives, they would come to no harm by my gun. For a long time not a single one fell, and my respect for Allah increased accordingly. But one day, when I was least expecting it, one of them met his doom at my hands. At once the air was thick with screaming birds that seemed to darken the sky. There was an angry chorus of "Caw-caw", and some even ventured to attack me. I fled indoors. For several days I dare not go out, because they were always on the watch. My mother, who always took my part, for once lost her temper with me. "Naughty boy!" she cried. "Why are you so cruel?" She took away my gun and locked it up in my grandfather's big metal trunk, which always reminded me of a tomb. "You shall have it once a week," she said, "provided that you let the poor crows alone. Your uncle ought never to have given you that horrid weapon."

I could do nothing. I had to content myself with practising at a target. However, I had one sympathiser, the old cook. She deplored the waste of ammunition. "What a lot of those thieves you could be bringing down!" was her constant lament. "Why don't you ask your father to take you to the estate? You could shoot there as much as you liked."

"What estate?"

She slapped her thigh and laughed a dry little laugh. Then a sinister look came into her dark parchmenty face; her black eyes glinted strangely, and the sparse moustache on her upper lip twitched.

"Tell me about the estate," I said, watching the hairy mole on her left cheek with fascinated interest.

She did not reply. She seemed to be scrutinizing me.

I repeated my request. I liked the oid sorceress, yet was afraid of her.

In a hoarse and grumpy voice she said: "You ought to know. Your father has a grand estate. Has he never mentioned it?"

"No, never."

"Well, you ought to find out for yourself. It is not for me to meddle. I am only a servant."

"Do tell me about it," I persisted.

She scratched her head, spat on her palm, rubbed her scalp with the saliva, and fixed me with her great glowing eyes. "Ask your father," she said at last. "All that I can say is that there's plenty to shoot on the

estate. It will be a nice change for you to go there . . . Now run away. I have work to do."

The hag was surely laughing at me. "Ask your father," she said. Not so easy. To begin with, he was rarely at home—only once a month for a week-end visit. Then he took little notice of me, and I was too shy to approach him. He was a large stern man who talked merely in grunts. Whenever he was expected, mother lectured us on our behaviour. We were almost afraid to open our mouths in his presence. He inspired awe. I longed to tell him of my prowess with the gun, but dared not broach the subject, though often it was on the tip of my tongue. I knew many boys, Hindu, Muslim and Christian, and sometimes visited their houses, and I could not understand why my father should be so different from theirs. Now and then I questioned mother, but she always changed the topic with a look of pain in her face. "He's fond of you," she would say, "for he has been talking to me about you. You ought to be proud of your father, for he is a very important man. Even the Vizier Sahib listens to him with respect. The last time he was in London he lunched with Churchill Khan . . ." Mother seemed to grow an inch or two as she said this.

Of course I was proud of my father, for I saw how people looked up to him; but he had no intimates and cared very little for general society. He rarely visited his club. To me he was a great puzzle.

When my sixteenth birthday came round it did not pass absolutely unnoticed; for father paid us one of his regular visits, and happened to arrive early. As there was nothing to do before lunch, mother timidly suggested to him that he might like to see me shoot. "It's only at a target," she said, "but Ali is quite good at it." Father agreed with a smile and watched me with interest. When I had done my best, he took the gun from me to try a few shots himself. The thing was far too small for him, but he scored a bull every time. "You are too good for me," I said with a laugh.

"Oh, dear me," he said, patting me on the back. "What you need is a few lessons and some practice with birds and animals."

My chance had come! "Father," I began, "I should like to ask you—"

Shyness, or my habitual timidity, made me stop.

Father surveyed me half-sympathetically, half-quizzically.

"Why not go on?" he said. "You wish to fly, and then find out that your wings are weak. Personally, I like frankness."

"I often feel that—"

"It's no good merely to feel."

"No, no, I sometimes wonder—"

"Wonder is fine. It makes life interesting."

"I can't express myself properly," I said dubiously.

"I'm glad you are not a chatterbox. Words are living things; if you cut them they bleed."

This gave me my cue. "I wonder whether you love me—or any one of us," I said.

He frowned. "You musn't force confidences, Ali. It's bad form, as the English would say. The deepest things have to be felt, not talked about."

I stood rebuked.

"Better say what's on your mind," he prompted.

"Can I come with you to the estate?" I brought out at last.

"Certainly."

"When?"

"Next week if you like."

"Thanks," I almost shouted with joy.

He looked at me silently, and a shadow passed over his face, as though he was thinking of something that lay behind.

For the next few days I talked of nothing but of my wonderful trip. Mother was not over-pleased, for she hated to part from me; but she felt that she had to agree.

Our cook was surprised when I told her that I was going to visit the estate. "Well, you will see many strange things," she said in sibylline accents, closing her eyes.

"What? You do add to my excitement."

"Both light and shadow. I see your fate on your face. The hour has struck. Allah has spoken. Allah be praised!"

"You do speak in riddles. What do you see on my face?"

"Bright ghosts. I hear a voice wailing in the night. Silence. Sorrow. Years that drop like dead leaves in a forgotten forest. Dreams dipped in rainbow light. A great pain that mounts, mounts, like a rising tide. But what will be, must be: submit. There's no other way. Life will give you what it denies to most—an experience that will sparkle in your memory like a star. It will endure beyond the edge of doom." . . . Suddenly she opened her eyes and stared at me vacantly.

I felt really frightened, not only by her wild, incoherent words, but by her curious trance-like gaze.

Slowly she came to herself, and heaved a vast sigh.

"You have been telling me some dreadful things," I said.

"Have I?"

"Why, don't you remember what you told me just now?"

"No. It's not I who speak at such

moments, but the Spirit."

"The Spirit! What's that?"

"Please don't ask questions. Believe. Explanations only darken the mystery. Unworthy as I am, the Spirit sometimes visits me and shows me what's hid from mortal eyes."

Here mother glided in. "If your Spirit was any good, instead of making you see what does not exist, it ought to have told you that the chicken, which is not far from your nose, is getting burned." She laughed sarcastically.

The old cook rose to her feet without a word.

"Look at the napkins!" cried mother. "They are in rags. And see the plates, and the knives, and spoons! They don't seem to have been cleaned properly. Ough! Everything is filthy here. This is not a kitchen, but a goat-house."

The cook coloured, but said nothing. She gave me a sly wink, as much as to say: "This is one of her usual storms, and will pass as quickly as it came."

I went out. The night was dense, an unending wall of blackness. There seemed to be no space between its atoms. The darkness eddied in a maddening tumult like the drumming of excited blood in my veins. I appeared to be seeking something. What?

I neither knew nor cared.

On the journey father told me something of our estate. "You can ride a horse or a camel as you please," he said; "and you'll find plenty to shoot. And you'll live like a prince, for our butter is just splendid and everything else is in keeping." These words delighted me, and the rest of the journey passed in a happy dream.

"We have arrived," said father when the train came to a stop. Wayside stations in India are gloomy places, but this one was terrible, with just one bleary lamp showing, making darkness still darker. A crowd of servants entered our compartment and took charge of our luggage, talking excitedly. Soon after we were shown into a dingy waiting-room, and partook of a cold meal, which tasted delicious. From without came the moan of the wind. "The voice of the desert," said father. "You'll come to love it, Ali."

An hour or so later the animals were brought round. Father mounted a fine black horse with silver trappings, and I was put on a camel in charge of a servant.

The moon was shining brightly as we set out. Before us lay the plain, indescribably beautiful, like a lake filled with light. The night

was cold, even crisp, and a silence as of death lay all around. Although I was in company the mournful hush awakened strange fears in me. In the silvery tide everything looked clear, yet somehow remote and mysterious. The bushes swayed as though shaken by unseen hands, and grey shapes darted across our track, swift as thought. Hearing my sudden exclamation, my driver said that they were hyenas that the witches rode by night. Further on we saw the remains of camels abandoned in the wilderness. I remember noticing a poor little dead donkey, partly devoured by the beasts of prey, gazing at the blue effulgence above with its sightless eyes.

It was a long and weary journey. The time passed in jokes, tales, and songs. At last we reached our destination. It was a pleasant surprise to see the dainty white cottage that was to be our home. It stood in a garden overlooking illimitable acres of sheer green. We were welcomed by the friendly barking of dogs and the calls and cries of the farmyard. Quite a crowd of men had collected to receive us—all retainers of our house; and I felt very important. After I had spoken to one and all, as seemed to be the custom, I was taken to a beautifully furnished room and made to lie down on a sofa piled high with cushions.

A few minutes later, while I dozed, father entered and said: Ali, if you are not too tired, come and see a wonder of nature."

I followed him upstairs.

"Look!" he said, pointing to the east.

I stood there, near the window, bewitched, gazing at the glory of the dawn. The hue of peacock's feathers had begun to flash on the rim of the horizon, the top branches of the trees in the garden became pink and golden, and the fields were inundated with liquid amber. It was all dazzlement, ecstasy. The world seemed scarcely real. It was illusion of an enchanted dream.

When I came to myself, I found that father had left. How delicately thoughtful he was! He had not wished to spoil my delight by a word or gesture. I almost laughed aloud to think that I had been afraid of him. Why, he was a dear. I was sure that I was going to like him immensely.

A servant came in to say that breakfast was ready.

It was a regular meal, and I ate voraciously.

Father hardly touched anything. His face was clouded and his manner abstracted; but he was very pleased to see me doing such justice to the food. "Take a wing of the partridge," he said.

"What about you? Why not join me?" I coaxed.

"No, nothing elaborate for me. A cup of coffee is all that I need in the morning."

"Then why this feast?"

"Because I want you to have a good time. And then, you know, you are not as strong as you might be. Wholesome food, fresh air and plenty of rest will fill out the hollows in your body. Your mother will be delighted. In fact, she let you come with me because I promised to fatten you. So please eat. For myself, I need a different treatment. I am gathering avoirdupois."

Here a tall gaunt man, with a beard covering half his own length strode in. He greeted father in a very dignified manner and then said: "At last the young master has remembered us. I should like to make his acquaintance."

Father introduced us, saying: "Ali meet Harnam Singh, a real shepherd of men. I have the highest respect for him."

The holy man smiled oddly, and his eyes, extraordinarily dark and brilliant, seemed to cling to my face. I had a feeling that the very crannies of my soul were being probed. At last, without removing his devouring glance which somehow makes me uncomfortable even now, he said: "Young man, your father is blessed with a golden tongue. I have often said that he could charm even a snake by just whistling to it."

"Now, now, no exaggerations," murmured father.

"Exaggerations! By Nanak, I'm telling the truth. You are too modest. You know perfectly well that the people here worship the very ground you tread on. Who has done more for them? If your son is anything like you, we have nothing to worry about."

"He's shaping well."

"Not enough flesh on his bones. Is there no food in the cities or what?"

I laughed, for the man himself was thin and ugly as a crow's father. But he silenced me with a lofty gesture and continued:

"Cities are no places for decent men to live in. They are cesspools of vice and corruption. And what honesty and simplicity there used to be in olden times has disappeared with the coming of the white man. I hate the false complexity of these days. Life, which was meant to be a hymn of joy, has become a burning pyre of pain. Greed stalks the world like a beast of prey. Even here, in this delightful oasis on the edge of the desert, men's faces have become green with envy. I see nothing but evil glances. Satan, having ravaged

Vilayet, has now come to peep through the eyes of our simple folk.

"City men have but two gods: continued Harnam Singh. "The job of one is to fill the other."

This seemed to me sheer impertinence, and I could not help saying: "And how many gods have you?"

"Eko avankar, sat nam" (There is but one God, and His name is truth). "He made life and death, joy and sorrow, good and evil, night and day. He blesses all, everything."

"Even evil?" asked father.

"Yes, even evil. Without His permission, it could not exist. He uses it for His own purposes."

"What purposes?" I inquired.

"Were there no darkness, light would be useless. You do not burn a lamp in daylight. We would not think of God if there were no evil. Pain and sorrow remove the scales from the eyes."

I found no answer to this, and so said: "But if all men are the children of God, then how can you abuse the peoples of the West?"

"I'm not abusing them, young man. All I am saying is that they do not know their Father; and not knowing Him, they fight among themselves over baubles."

"Is that true?"

"Just think of the horrid way in which they destroyed one another for years. I wept at their folly. What did they quarrel about? Money, money, money. Some fiend created that base metal. Its very touch corrupts."

"Once again he's right, Ali," said father. "Money, or self-interest, guides men and nations. The real riches, however, have to do with inward growth. This has little or no meaning for most of us. Here we have a lot to learn from the Hindus, whom we despise because they do not knife each other at the least provocation. It is silly to call them an inferior race. As a matter of fact, they are very wise people."

"Inferior race indeed!" cried Harnam Singh, spitting disgustedly. "Who is superior? Nanak alone is superior." With that, he crept out slowly, like a cat on the look out for a bird, and then suddenly lifting his pointed nose into the air, watched, as though choosing his prey. Sure enough, he found it. "Akbar, did you put the herbs on your wound?" he shouted to a passing lad.

"No! The bandage would not stay."

"Nanak, what fools these peasant children be! Come here, rascal. I shall have to do it myself."

He caught the boy by the scruff

of the neck and hobbled off.

We all laughed.

It had suddenly become very hot. The iron-blue sky poured invisible molten lead from the tips of the motionless palm fronds; on the ground quivered a network of light and shadow; and in the air a shrill bird hurled insults at the blinding sun. "Damn your eyes! Damn your eyes!" it seemed to be saying. Or so I fancied.

We lolled in ancient armchairs on the verandah, drinking cool sherbet, while a couple of servants relieved one after another at the task of fanning us.

Father was reading Doughty's *Arabia Deserta.* Suddenly he put it down and asked: "What did you think of Harnam Singh?"

"A queer fellow. He frightened me with his searching glance. It was like a powerful lamp held before one's face."

"Exactly how I felt when I first met him; but that's a fine fellow. Very, very wise; and what is no less important he has guts, real guts. Moreover, he knows what he believes. Most Westerners don't. That's the real trouble with them. They have no faith, no convictions no awareness of larger issues. They turn again and again in the same hole. The sorrow of the West is not seen by those who have never quitted it, nor by any save those who have returned there after a long absence. I went to Europe several times, and always I felt as though I was suffocating."

"But Western science has done wonders," I said, just to put in a word.

"It's straying from the true path. I call it the triumph of Matter over Mind. Because we have neglected spiritual values everything has gone wrong with us. We have not grown in grace and beauty, but have simply become puffed up with our own importance. This seems mere childishness. All said and done, what are we, be we white, black or brown! Mere straws in the wind . . ."

But perhaps I had better not describe our talk. It may bore you. For myself, I confess, I found it enthralling. I had not as yet entered the world of ideas. It is a bourne from which no traveller returns. Horizon opens on horizon, and the quest is endless. Knowledge may be a fine thing, but ignorance is much finer; it opens out infinite possibilities. It is creative. Were there no mystery, life would become a mechanical process, devoid of all savour. Wise passivity is sometimes the highest point we mortals can reach.

However, I hate spinning philosophical cobwebs. I leave that to

those who care for such things. What I really wished to say is that I was getting to know father better. He was quite different here from what he was at home. "If only mother could see him now," I thought. "Why she would have a fit!"

Evening came tripping on little fairy feet. The mauve reflections of the sunset trembled on the limpid waters of the lily-pond, a heat haze rose from the brooding fields; on the misty horizon purple hills rose to meet the sky, and somewhere far away a threshing machine was droning patiently.

I descended. Father had arranged a concert in the garden.

There were three musicians. One of them was a youngster of eighteen, handsome as a god. There was something very attractive about his smile. He seemed to be a great favourite, and the peasants and workers made much of him. He squatted on the mat, daintily arranged the folds of his long coat about him, and began to hum a rehearsal of his part. By his side sat an old man, who had the head of an adder—small, with yellow eyes and a mildly suspicious glance. His instrument was a kind of flute—a long reed-like thing with many holes in it. The third musician, a youngish man with large sleepy eyes, was a performer on a drum.

At a signal from father the entertainment began. The flute and the drum discoursed a plaintive melody, while the boy sang and danced in unison. It was all quite new to me. Starting with a slow measure, the tempo became more rapid and worked up to a kind of frenzy. Then the time-sequence was reversed. The notes fell soft as autumn leaves. And I heard the boy sing:

*In the midnight of thy locks*
*I renounce the day;*
*In the ring of thy rose-lips,*
*I forget to pray.*

When he ceased, the old man added in a surprisingly sweet voice:

*Our Prophet pined for the sight of Allah,*
*But, then, beloved, you were not there.*

And the youngish man with large sleepy eyes put in:

*A night with you, love,*
*Is worth a thousand years of prayer.*

The peasants and the workers, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh, showed their appreciation by shakings of heads and wild cries. Father threw

some money to the musicians, who bowed their thanks. The entire performance affected me like some dim echo from the past. I loved the life that was opening for me, but as yet it was scarcely real.

The concert continued long after dinner, and then the party broke up. The men dispersed to their homes, delighted with the entertainment.

Before my bedtime came, father entered to say good-night. "Better turn in straightaway," he said, "for you must be up pretty early. There'll be a shoot, and the horses and hounds will be waiting." Then, with a wistful smile, he left me.

I found that one of the men had been told off to sleep in my room and tell me stories until I fell asleep. Very odd, I thought; for I was no longer a child. However, not to hurt the fellow's feelings, I said nothing. He was a tall, meagre, bony Hindu, wrapped in an old red cloth tunic, which left his long, thin naked legs exposed. He lay at the foot of my bed, chewing *pan* and feeling perfectly happy. From his manner he was very anxious to please me.

"Would you like a ghost story or a love story, master?" he asked.

"The first kind, please."

"A ghost story demands darkness," he said, getting up and lowering the wick of the lamp, which went out in a cascade of tiny flashes.

In a thin, wheezy voice he began to tell me of a phantom that was heard, soon after each new moon, crying sorrowfully in the stillness of the night.

"But have you seen her?"

"Many times."

"What does she look like?"

"A beautiful woman, with a face very wan and drawn."

"How interesting!"

"Sad, you mean. She is seeking her lost love."

"I thought Allah gave that sort of thing to the faithful in paradise," I said irreverently.

"I don't know about that. I am a Hindu. But I do know that there be those who wander in the mid-region."

"How dreadful!"

"It's like that. If you leave your heart on earth, there is no peace for you afterwards."

"I thought death ended all."

The man laughed pityingly. "Death is only the beginning of another life."

I was about to joke about this when I heard muffled voices and the peculiar noise of horses' hoofs striking on the gravel, not far away, in the grounds. "What's that?" I said.

For a while the man sat staring

into space, his eyes glinting like opals.

I repeated my question.

He shook his head mysteriously. "Don't take any notice. We often hear strange sounds. Whatever you do, don't espy upon the ghosts. They don't like it. It's best to leave them alone."

I now began to conjecture why father had never brought me here. Could the ghosts have anything to do with it?

The man, however, went on with the story of the wailing beauty.

I hardly listened. I was too tired, and soon fell asleep. But I had a troubled night. The musical performance was re-enacted, and with it came the beat of ghostly hoofs. I felt myself wandering in a delightful garden, where each tree, each blossom was a miracle of loveliness. But I lingered not: I was hurrying along, carrying some precious treasure that I jealously guarded. Suddenly, as I turned a corner, it was snatched away from me by unseen hands. I heard a mocking laugh, and at the instant I awoke.

It was still dark. The silence round the house had turned into a myriad of delicate tones, like sounds tinkled out on fairy bells. I couldn't decipher this subtle music. I felt lulled and lost.

When I opened my eyes again, it was broad daylight. The sun shone brightly and threw its gold on the tiled floor; a faint symphony floated in on the warm, perfumed air; it was, as I discovered later, the humming of the bees, which during the mowing season seem to get excited and particularly tuneful.

How good it was to be alive, with all the shadows of night swept away!

Father was waiting for me in the dining-room. He looked tired, but greeted me affably. After a slight breakfast, we set out on our hunt.

I noticed that father was mounted on a bay horse. "Where's your black charger?" I asked.

He hesitated a little, and then said with a laugh: "It's too precious to risk in a hunt."

I was given a horse that they thought was safe for me. There were many huntsmen in the company and a goodly following of hounds. We pushed ahead, until we came to a large corn-field. We dismounted and saw to our guns. From all sides was heard the chatter of birds. "Here's a chance for your gun, Ali," said father; "the rascals are stealing my grain. The little thieves!"

"Look, master," whispered a beater, pointing to a dark patch in the field; "there they go!"

I took rapid aim and fired. Most of the birds took flight, but two or

three were left writhing on the ground. These were soon despatched by the men with a pious prayer. "Allah, ya Allah," they crooned as they cut their throats. If this invocation were omitted, I learned, no man would touch a bird even though starving.

I was much struck by the keenness of vision displayed by Azam, one of the beaters. I now noticed that he was the same boy who had sung and danced so well at the concert of the previous evening. He was able to see a flock of birds where our own eyes showed us nothing but shifting shadows. He was an excellent shot as well, and many partridges for our supper fell to his gun. He was full of youthful high spirits, and was the very life of the beaters' party.

We had brought down scores of partridges, both brown and black, when a peasant came running to tell us that he had seen two gazelles near a winding pool not far away. This was welcome news, and we pushed forward.

In front went the horsemen with their glittering spears; the hounds leaped forward from the leash, yelping with delight; and the big drum beat a loud warning of our approach to all strangers. Father was quite excited and appeared to throw aside all cares. "Careful, Ali," he said; "you'll have to gallop like the wind. The race is always to the swiftest."

"Halt!" cried Azam, as we neared the pool. A quail rose suddenly from the grass and dropped like a pebble among the shrubs; a huge black scorpion crawled swiftly past us, and behind it, at a respectable distance, a strange creature like a toad was fleeing towards the water.

"Look!" said Azam to me.

For a moment I stood admiring the two gazelles. They were a vision of beauty. Never have I seen anything alive that is so graceful in every movement. However, my thoughts were interrupted by the cry of Azam. "Bismillah!" he shouted quite near me.

"Bismillah! Bismillah!" took up the horsemen as they dashed forward to the attack.

The gazelles, even before they saw or heard us, threw back their heads, snorted, and fled. We gave them chase. Although we were mounted, it was impossible to catch up with them. They sped like streaks of lightning. The only thing to do was to tire them out. This we succeeded in doing. But when we despatched them, I felt unhappy and unclean, as though I had participated in something ignoble. It seemed to me wicked to destroy

what Nature had meant to be an elixir for the eye.

"Well done!" said father, coming up to Azam and patting him kindly on the back.

This was a well-merited tribute, for Azam had outstripped us all, and had, single-handed, cornered the gazelles. Although he could have speared them easily and thus claimed most of the glory for himself, he had not done so. He deliberately waited to give the others a chance to distinguish themselves. I thought this fine; it almost redeemed for me the ghastly sight of the butchery.

The heat had become more and more oppressive. The vertical sun glared down angrily and the earth gasped with a dry, dusty sultriness. There was something impenetrable and foreboding about the sky: it was raining down some burning fluid. I closed my eyes for an instant and saw nothing but an ocean of blinding redness. It was as though everything was swimming in blood.

"What's the matter?" said father, who happened to be near.

I pulled myself together with an effort and murmured lamely: "It's the heat; I can't bear it."

"Let us return to the lodge. It's not far away."

When we had rested a while and I was beginning to feel better, father asked: "How did you like the hunt, Ali?"

"Fine; but I did feel for the poor gazelles."

"So did I; but I wished to see how you would react. Never wantonly destroy beauty." He was silent for a moment, and then said: "Do you know why I brought you here? It was for you to see something of what one day you'll have to control. Remember, and remember well, that you may admire loveliness as much as you like, but that duty always comes first; and duty means doing the right thing in scorn of consequences. Here, I think, the English surpass all other nations. Not intelligence, but character, is their strong point. The French are too subtle, and that's their undoing. Thought deals with *post factum* things; life has to do with the awareness of the moment, which, even as you reflect upon it, becomes a memory, liable to self-deception. In brief, do as your deepest instinct tells you. The rest is excuses, excuses, nothing but excuses . . ." He lay back dreamily in his chair and closed his eyes.

We lingered in the hunting lodge until the cool of the evening.

Azam entered. "Master," he said to father, "there are two huge birds that come here every evening to

drink at the pools. I saved them purposely for you. And perhaps the young master would like to have a shot at them." He looked at me and smiled.

Most of the men were dismissed to their homes and told to carry away the gazelles and the partridges. We ourselves went on to the pools, guided by Azam. Here and there on our way we encountered puddles of stagnant water, almost hidden by an inextricable maze of roots and aquatic plants. Flocks of birds peopled these swampy wastes, and amongst them Azam distinguished the heron, the black stork, and the brown ibis. These unwieldy birds, perched like sentries on the stunted trees that abound in this part of the country, stared at us stupidly as we passed and let themselves be killed with such stolid indifference that we soon tired of the monotonous slaughter.

The sun was just dippling below the horizon when there was a rush of wings overhead. We hid behind a hedge, and waited. Right in front of us a great snow-white bird dropped straight to the ground at the margin of the pool. In the half-light it looked as though a meteor had fallen from the clouds. I took rapid aim and fired. "I've hit him!" I cried exultantly as the bird fell into the pool, and floated struggling on the surface. Azam at once waded in. He came running to us with the bird, exclaiming: "Why, it's a hen! Now its mate will be along very soon. We must hide again." The wounded bird was crying piteously and struggled to get free from Azam's hand. "Sing, my lady, sing," Azam whispered, "and your lord and master will soon be here." Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the male bird swept past. The hen had seen him, and redoubled her cries. At once the cock bird swerved in its course and hovered shrieking over our heads. With a quick aim father brought it down.

With this last addition to our spoils we turned back home. Gently and stealthily the night was creeping from the underwood, covering the meadows and fields with warm shadows. A stillness sank over the earth while round the moon the stars hovered, like golden moths round an alabaster lamp.

I was rather tired, and so dropped into an arm-chair in the garden with a sigh of pleasure. Father left to attend some business.

About the same time as on the previous day the musicians presented themselves, another boy taking the place of Azam, who, it was said amid roars of laughter, was "preparing himself for a good feed." Af-

ter the exciting hunt, it was a delightful experience to listen to the pensive music. From the parterres came the perfume of night-opening flowers sweetly disturbing. Earth and sky were perfectly attuned.

The concert lasted till dinner was announced. We sat to a late hour, however, hearing the reports of the peasants and giving them orders. Soon after, I went to bed, but the servants continued their festivities far into the night. I could distinguish the shrill voice of Azam, telling some droll stories. At intervals there were loud bursts of laughter.

The story-teller was again in attendance in my room. He squatted on the mat, looking absurdly like a huge frog. Thinking that I was interested in ghosts, he began to tell me of the amazing adventures of three headless horsemen. I was tired out and paid little heed to his words. But just as I was dozing off to sleep, I heard again the beat of hoofs in the grounds and, what is more, the unmistakable neigh of a horse. Once again the man seemed to take no notice, but I said: "Who on earth can that be?"

"Ghosts, master, ghosts! The place is full of them. But there's no need to be alarmed. They never harm anyone unless he looks at them."

I wasn't convinced. It was clear that the man was trying to divert my attention from the mysterious sounds. Wherefore? I recalled some rumours I had heard about smuggling in this part of the country. Could there be any connection with that? But I was too drowsy to think coherently, and soon fell asleep.

It must have been nearly dawn when I was awakened by cries and lamentations. They became more and more heart-rending as the mourners approached our cottage. I roused my attendant and inquired what it all meant. He yawned, rubbed his eyes with his fist, yawned again, and muttered: "Only someone dead, master."

"Go and find out who it is."

Slowly and grudgingly he obeyed my order.

Soon he returned with the news. "It's Azam," he said.

"Azam!" I cried,, hardly believing my ears. "You are making a mistake."

"It's Azam all right. He was bitten by a snake and died within an hour. Karma!" . . . The man settled himself afresh on the mat, carefully wrapping his scanty blanket around him.

"Azam!" I repeated, aghast. "Are you perfectly sure?"

"Yes, yes," he murmured drowsily. "Old Bashgir, his father, told

me the story himself. Who can escape his Karma?" he sighed, lying down.

The whole thing appeared incredible to me. Only a few hours ago I had heard Azam's merry laughter and now he was dead! "Gopal," I said, "tell me more about this."

"There's not much to tell," he replied, yawning. "It's the same old tale again. After last night's feast, Azam threw himself on his mat and was asleep almost at once. Two hours later he roused his father and made signs that he had been bitten in the neck. The old man lighted his storm lamp to look at him, and it was then that he saw the horrible snake in a corner of the hut. There it lay, so quiet, yet so deadly. Bashgir bashed its head with his shoe lest it might do more harm. When he turned to his boy, he was already dead. We are all subjects to Karma; it can't be evaded."

This Karma business jarred on my nerves. I felt like hitting the man in the face for his supineness. There was no protest, no rebellion, no sorrow in his voice. He might have been a robot. Had feeling nothing to do with destiny? Was God, who created everything, a soulless machine? No, no, no, something within me kept saying; it is the man who is insensitive.

"Go and awaken father," I said impatiently, "and tell him what's happened."

"Why disturb the master? The boy is dead, and nothing can bring him back to life. Besides, the master has to get up early tomorrow morning to inspect the crops. It's no use worrying him for nothing."

"Very well, you had better take another nap," I said, "but be careful that there are no snakes here."

"I'm prepared to go when Krishna is pleased to call me. Death comes only once, but there are men who die ten times a day. I call them mice, not men."

He lay down and was soon snoring.

As for me, sleep was impossible. The voices of the mourners could no longer be heard, but the dirge still rang in my ears. Why did it haunt me so? Tears rose to my eyes. I could not help wondering at the strange dispensation of Allah—that crows should be gifted with long lives while poor Azam was cut off in all the promise of his youth. Was one born merely to become meat for worms? What was the use of it all, especially if one was mowed down before one had attained one's maturity?

Suddenly I felt the appalling futility and brevity of life, the vanity of hopes, the fragility of attachments, the meaninglessness of

all action. Perhaps Gopal's will-lessness had a deeper sense than I could divine. And I remembered the words of an English boy, a classmate of mine: "What's the good of anyfink?—why, nuffink." We used to call him Mr. Nuffink. Was he right after all?

When at last I arose there was the usual morning bustle in the house. The horses were neighing under the trees; the dogs barked; and the sparrows twittered as they hopped about playfully.

Father was on the verandah, and said, slowly removing the cigar from his mouth: "Poor Azam is dead. A snake bite last night."

"Horrible! I can scarcely believe it. Azam dead! I feel as though I had lost a friend."

"He was a fine lad. Clean, upright, manly. I should give much to hear him laugh again."

"Father," I burst out, "why are those beastly snakes allowed to live?"

He shook his head mournfully. "That's one of the dread secrets of Nature. The toe of death is always trying to touch the heel of life, ever anxious to trip it up. It's bound to succeed." He sighed. Then after a puff or two, he said: "Don't forget for your own sake, Ali, that these parts are never free of snakes."

"I'll keep a sharp lookout; but do they come into the house?"

"Not often, for this is not a mud hut like Azam's."

"Why don't you give them proper houses to live in, father?"

He did not answer at once. After a long pause, he said: "Of course I could, but there are difficulties."

"What difficulties?"

"Your mother will not like it, and it is possible that you will share her views one day."

"I want our peasants to have proper houses to live in," I said.

"Since you feel that way, let me unfold to you a dream of mine. I don't want you to turn into a poor man. I don't believe in that sort of thing. The body has its claims. If it is neglected or starved the spirit which inhabits it cannot function properly. Denial is a Hindu eccentricity. What I would like you to do is to practise a little healthy asceticism. That is, when I am gone, to take no more from the estate than the quantity and quality of work you put in. You must act as a trustee for the peasants."

"That doesn't sound very hard."

He smiled. "Youth is ever generous. It is the old who are always grabbers—perhaps because they know that they cannot grab for long . . . well, I have talked too much. Now, if you feel inclined for some shooting, I'll give the order.

I've business in another part of the estate."

Azam's death and father's talk had taken away all inclination for further adventures that day. Also I had a feeling that destruction of defenceless creatures like the gentle gazelles and the great white birds was an essentially mean occupation. So I declined the offer with thanks.

"Well, you'll find the horses if you feel disposed to take a ride," said father, rising from the table. He left the house, accompanied by Hussein, his favourite attendant.

I lounged in my chair, thinking of all that father had said. Personally, I had been brought up to believe that one was entitled to all that one earned. How it was done—I mean the ethics of the matter—had not occurred to me. But something told me that father was right. Perhaps I was prejudiced in his favour. I do not know. All that I can say is that I had always held him in the highest esteem. I was proud of him. But I cannot say that I had loved him so far. No, he had given me no such chance. He had kept himself aloof, and had done nothing to win my affection. I had even stood in awe of him. But now he was going out of his way to be nice to me. Instead of giving me instructions, as he might have done, he had spoken to me gently, tenderly, as to an intimate friend. This manner affected me greatly. Father rose to a new height for me. And what he said made the same powerful impression upon me as the pensive music I had heard in the flush of the evening in the garden.

Dreamily I gazed through the open window at the peasants moving hither and thither. The autumn sunshine lay like a cloth of gold spread over the fields; from the distance came the voices of the reapers singing at their work; brightly clad women passed to and fro, stacking the harvest on donkeys and bullocks; and from somewhere rose the whirring and throbbing of the engines. A sudden impulse came upon me to get up and share this active life. I felt that I must ride, so I gave the order. I mounted and set out, waving aside the attentions of the fussy little groom. As I turned the corner I heard the sounds of altercation, but paid no heed. I was bent on exercising my cramped limbs.

I rode on for some miles, letting the horse take its course. Not until then did I notice that they had given me father's black charger. I was thrilled to be on so fine an animal. He scarcely seemed to touch the earth; he flew along.

The horse brought me to a grove,

and stopped under a tree at some distance from a pretty brick cottage. All my endeavours to urge him further were in vain. So I alighted, tied him to a branch, and went ahead on foot.

The front door of the house was open, and as there was no answer to my knock, I walked in. I was in a small courtyard into which a number of chambers opened. The first room which I entered contained a beautiful marble tomb strewn with fresh flowers and garlands. Above it hung a gigantic egg. All was silence, except for the sound of the wind in the courtyard. I looked in wonderment at the magnificent tomb and its modest surroundings.

"Ah, the master!" said a soft voice behind me.

I turned round. A young girl stood facing me, smiling innocently.

For a moment I stood bewitched. At last I asked inanely: "Whose tomb is that?"

I thought she looked puzzled; but after a pause, she said: "Of a very holy man—a saint. But won't master honour us by resting a little in our humble house?"

She took me into a living room, much more luxuriously furnished than I should have expected. She seated me in a comfortable armchair and left me, saying that she would return with some refreshments.

"But I don't want anything," I said. "I've come in uninvited."

"Master must not talk like that. This is a rare honour."

I bowed.

She soon came back with a wooden tray, on which were curds and dried fruits and some home-made cakes.

I said I was not hungry, but she pressed upon me with graceful insistence to partake; so I yielded, while she stood scanning me with friendly interest. Damnably pretty she was as she remained leaning against the doorpost. Her black hair, with reflections of blue, was worn high in Hindu fashion; her nose was small and delicate; and she had all the fine features and soft contours of a well-born Hindu maiden. Wonderful were her eyes, dark as night, spell-binding as the stars. I gazed at her, breathless with admiration.

"Won't you sit by me?" I said timidly, very timidly.

She hesitated. "How can I, master?" she murmured.

"Suppose you try."

She made no answer, but came towards me with a witching smile on her pretty lips. Shyly she seated herself beside me. She looked at me kindly, and began to prattle about

her daily life. She told me about the milking of the cows and when they yield most milk; about the fruit trees and the vineyards which father had introduced; about the bee and when the combs are full, and about many other interesting things. It was the most gracious introduction to our estate that I could have imagined.

The time seemed to fly; but at last I recollected father and said: "You must forgive me if I leave now. Father might be waiting for me."

"I've often seen the big master," she said. "What a fine man he is! Look what he gave me!" and she displayed a dainty locket of gold.

I smiled. Then I said: "I must really go now. But I may come again?"

"Of course you may, and as often as you like."

I mounted my horse and sped home, softly humming to myself. Why? The devil alone knows.

Father had not yet returned, and this was a relief to me, for I was in no mood to answer questions.

The groom who took my horse looked at it in astonishment. He cursed and cried and said: "There's going to be a warming of pants."

"What?"

"A warming of pants."

"What for?"

"Some dithering idiot, son of a mangy she-camel, has made a huge blunder and given you the black charger. No one but the big master may ride it. Strict orders on that point. Oh, Allah, we are in for a bad time!" The man trembled as he spoke.

"Don't worry. I'll tell father that I asked for it."

"If—if I were you," mumbled the man, shaking like a leaf, "I shouldn't. Not nice for you, and positively bad for us. It's best to keep quiet."

"But why are you so afraid? Father is not an ogre."

"You are his son, but you don't seem to know him. His orders must be obeyed. Not that he is fond of giving thrashings. Oh no. His look is enough. It freezes your blood. So please don't say anything to him." The fellow looked at me implor-ingly.

All this puzzled me greatly, but I reassured the man, and retired to my room.

That night I slept little; my mind was full of the happenings of that eventful day. And I was bent on discovering who the mysterious person was that rode out at night. A feeling possessed me that there was some connection between the black beauty and the midnight trav-eller. But no one made use of the

horse except father, and the horse had instinctively found its way to the cottage. What could father possibly have to do with the tomb, and especially, with the young girl I had met by chance? And he had given her presents! Why? I was resolved to find out.

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," I said.

It was father. "Sorry to disturb your pleasant dreams," he said, smiling, "but I have to be absent for a few days. Urgent business. Can't explain its nature. Well, you'll be by yourself for a long while, unless, of course you wish to come along with me."

"Can't the business wait?"

"Out of the question. Can I bring you anything from Karachi?"

"No, thanks. But I am sorry you have to go away at this unearthly hour. What a nuisance!"

"Yes it is. There is so much work to do here. And I shall have to convince the authorities that what I am doing is for the good of the country. But who bothers about the ultimates? The official mind clings to the past like a lizard to the rock. Well, are you coming with me or staying on here?"

"Staying on. I'm much too tired to undertake a long ride in the night." This was true, but only partially so; I wanted to see more of the young girl in the grove. Why? I am sure I didn't know at the time.

That night I dreamed a lovely dream; but I am not going to talk about it. Relating dreams is like putting a butterfly on the wheel. However you turn it, it always looks at you reproachfully with its squashed face. But I may say that I heard no suspicious sounds at or after midnight. No doubt remained in my mind as to who the mysterious traveller was. It was father. But what could he be doing at this late hour?

I rose early. It was a glorious morning; the sun shone brightly, but not too ardently, and a breeze blew from the river that seemed to caress the face in a special way, like the touch of a mother's hand. In Europe the birds twitter timidly, as though unused to great gladness; here they sang with complete abandon, filling earth and heaven with their sweet jargon.

Directly after breakfast I went for a gallop, rejoicing in the fresh air and the scent that rose from the rich moist earth. I felt to the full the joy of living. The world was indeed very fair.

I had not the least difficulty in finding the red-rose cottage nestling among the palms. I rode straight up to the door. As before, it was open,

and I walked in.

She was in the courtyard, drawing water from the well. She was dressed as before, but her raven hair was crowned with a garland of white flowers. Her cheeks were flushed with exercise and her dark eyes sparkled with animation. Seeing me, she blushed, looked down, and stood silent.

"Have you no helper?" I asked. "It must be hard work for those pretty hands."

"There's no one but my old father and mother; and he left last night with the master."

"So Hussein is your father?"

"Yes, and he's very good to me."

"Nice fellow. And your mother?"

"Poor dear mother!" she sighed; "she's almost blind, and I have to do everything for her."

"I'm sorry to hear that; but how did she lose her sight?"

"Because of me."

"Because of you! What do you mean?"

"We were poor at the time, and she had a terrible amount of sewing to do to keep the house together. That was bad enough. Then—I was still a child—the house caught fire. I was in an inner room. Mindless of the flames and the smoke, she rushed in to save me. She was badly burnt about the face, and has never seen properly since then."

"A very brave woman. Merits a V.C."

"What's that?"

"A medal that they give for heroism."

"That wouldn't rejoice her. You see, all she cares for is Allah."

"Is she very pious?"

"I don't know what you mean by that. She is godly."

A moment of silence.

"Poor mother!" she said feelingly. "She longs to see me as I am; for, of course, she remembers me only as a tiny tot."

"I can understand her grief. Indeed, I sympathise with her very much, for my own eyes tell me how much she has lost."

She blushed prettily. "Does the master think me nice to look at?"

"Could anyone with eyes think other-wise? But, in the name of Allah, don't call me master."

"Then what am I to call you?"

"My friends call me Ali. Won't that suit?"

"Ali! Ali!" she repeated softly. "I didn't know that my name could sound so nice."

"But master, or Ali, if you like, you must not stand in the courtyard. Come into the house."

"Very well, I obey; but won't you tell me your name?"

"Kismet," she murmured.

"It's a sweet name and suits you."

She ran indoors and I followed her.

The day was hot, but the room into which she took me was delightfully cool. The windows opened on to a garden, where the parterres burned like a bouquet of fire, while a cloud of butterflies floated higher and thither, white as wonder. Above the soft droning of the bees, busy among the flowers, rose, at intervals, the questing cries of an unseen bird, who became shriller and more passionate as the sun gathered more fire. Only Schubert could have copied the magic pattern of this melody against the tremulous whispering of the leaves in the trees.

I lay back lazily in the cosy armchair and closed my eyes. Life should be like this, I thought, a gentle moving to music.

"Are you tired?"

"No, only happy."

"Happy! Why?"

"It's so soothing here. This is a dream house. Who chose this site and who designed the garden?"

"That I can't say; but everybody knows that the cottage was given us by the master, your father. It is one of a number that are being constructed. Your father is very kind. Everybody blesses him."

"I'm delighted to know that your family received the first of the new houses; but it's your presence that confers distinction upon this one. Without you, it would lose half or more of its charm." I said this, but I was surprised. However, it was just like father, to do a good thing and say nothing about it.

"How silly of me!" cried the girl. "Let me bring you some refreshments."

"Please don't trouble."

"I made the curds myself, so you must do me the honour."

I could not refuse.

While I ate, she prattled about the dairy and her favourite cow. All reserve had now vanished between us. She had a hundred and one questions to ask about Karachi and the life there.

"You would lose yourself there before you could look round," I said, laughing.

"I wouldn't be afraid if I were with you."

I couldn't help admiring her naive frankness. She was like a spirit of the mountains that had descended into the lower world of men. In her presence I felt exalted, and longed to share that finer life she seemed to enjoy.

"Have you heard of Harnam Singh, the holy man?" she asked *a propos* of nothing.

"I've even met him. A strange fellow."

"He's a real saint. He did some-

thing wonderful yesterday."

"What?"

"A peasant was bitten by a snake, and was about to cut off his foot, when Harnam Singh appeared on the scene. He merely muttered something and dressed the wound with an onion—a mere onion! Well, the man lives and is as well as ever. Isn't that marvellous?"

"That's nothing," I said. "What is truly marvellous is that the sun is shining, the birds are singing and we are together."

She looked at me oddly and said: "Are you a poet too?"

"Why 'too'?"

She was silent. A tear rolled down her cheek.

"Why, what's the matter? Have I —have I said anything to hurt you?"

She did not speak for a long time. Then dabbing her eyes, she said: "You remind me of poor Azam."

"Did you know him?"

"Yes."

"And he—did he care for you?"

"I think so."

"So if he were alive to-day you would have married him?" I blurted out, though the words sounded very crude to me.

She laughed. "How solemn you look!" she said.

"It's the heat . . . I'm not used to it," I dissembled as best as I could.

"Have a little more curd."

Her mockery, though unconscious, was none the less galling.

"Shall I bring you a fresh pot of curd?"

"Please do."

When she returned I remarked nonchalantly: "So you were engaged to be married to Azam?"

She began to laugh. "Who put that funny idea into your head?" she said at last. "We were very fond of one another—as great friends are. He came here often and amused us very much. Always singing and joking. A nice boy. Mother was always pleased to see him. He made her laugh. His death has caused us real sorrow. He was gay and light-hearted—just like a bird. We shall never hear again his merry voice." She sighed.

I do not know why but I ate the whole pot of curd.

"Did you know Azam?"

"Yes, and I liked him very much. A fine fellow."

"I'm glad you think so."

The minutes fled past, and then alas, it was time to go. She sat in front of me, looking at me intently, her fingers playing with the folds of her dress.

"I'm sorry, but I must be going," I said.

"Must you?"

"Yes, Kismet; but I'll come to-morrow, if I may."

"Till tomorrow," she whispered shyly, dropping her gaze.

She accompanied me to the door.

"Good-bye," I said.

"Good-bye."

She stood looking at me as I rode away.

That night I could not sleep, and tossed restlessly on my bed. Would the day never come? I kept thinking of Kismet. How simple and natural she was! No guile, no coquetry, no straining after effects. Everything about her seemed to be just right—her dress, her gait, her gestures, her voice. I kept on remembering her eyes, two pools of beautiful blackness in which danced golden stars, and her lips curved to a kiss, a flower-kiss.

Morning at last! I leaped from my couch, and my horse soon bore me to the grove of my dreams.

She was watching for me by the open door and greeted me with a welcoming smile. The day was so lovely that I suggested a ramble among the trees. We ran forward like children, gay and happy with not a care in the world. At last, tired, we lay down on the soft moss at the foot of a great tree. From overhead came the cooing of doves. The warm rays of the sun filtered through the thick foliage, exhilirating as wine. We tossed leaves at one another, and laughed in glee at our foolish play.

"What's that?" I asked, noticing a curious mark on her right arm.

"They say I was born with it. It's peculiar, isn't it?"

"No, it's a beauty spot."

She laughed. "You are very flattering to-day. Perhaps it's the sun."

Gently I raised the arm and pressed it to my lips.

She moved nearer to me. She lay beside me like a dainty visitant from fairyland, and I could not resist the temptation to kiss those pretty lips. She returned my kisses with a warmth that surprised me. Then I know not what demon possessed me.

When I could reflect, I found Kismet lying on her back, sleepily crooning. I asked her what she was singing, but she only laughed and said that she did not know. To me it was the spirit of the ripening corn, the voice of the noon-day sun, the call of the doves, the utterance of all sentient things. Was she not their priestess? In this tender unconscious music of the heart, this lyric cry of the soul, she brought me very near to her. I felt that I had found a perfect mate. Nothing could ever part her from me. Nothing.

We met again, and again. But why describe divine felicity? Words, the best and the finest, are weak, wayward things, incapable of even suggesting what I felt then. Those regal days, when I live in paradise—I tremble to think of them, lest, by the fatal bane of beauty, they fade from my memory. I do not ask for a repetition of them in some future life. Oh no. Enough that I, a mere nobody, received a gift from the treasury of heaven. Enough, enough, enough!

A week of sweet, oblivious madness. Is that nothing in a whole lifetime? Byron has said:

*Count o'er the joys, thine hours have seen,*
*Count o'er the days from anguish free;*
*And know, whatever thou hast been,*
*'Tis something better—not to be.*

This is the language of ignorance. I have never felt like that. I am glad to have been for at least seven days. The rest of my sojourn on earth—well, it does not signify. It was decreed that I might not have a longer hour for love. But I did warm my hands at the blaze of life.

I am merely trying to say that to our happy dreams there came a rude awakening. One afternoon, as we lay side by side, silent but happy, we heard the gallop of horses in the clearing, and jumped up in alarm.

We were not a minute too soon. Just coming in sight was father on his black charger, followed by Hussein. He tossed the reins to his attendant, and walked towards us with an angry expression. "So this is why you wanted to stay behind?" he remarked sarcastically. "Pray, who is this young girl?"

I was so taken aback that I could find no words to reply.

"Why don't you speak?" he cried, giving me a withering glance.

What could I say?

"Since you have lost your tongue, I'll have to use mine."

I said nothing. I stood like one paralysed.

"Return home at once," he ordered, "and I'll talk to you later." Then, turning to Hussein, he said: "Take this child indoors, and tell her mother that I sent her in."

Silently he mounted his horse. "I'm waiting for you, Ali," he said; "hurry up."

Soon we were riding together. All the way no word was spoken, but there was a settled frown on his face.

I recovered from my shock, and waited with impatience the promised explanation. I felt suddenly strong enough to fight the whole

world. I wanted my Kismet, and no one, I said to myself, could separate us. No one, not even father. My agitation sought relief in the lashing of my horse; but father did not increase his pace, and I reached home first. When he came up, we dismounted. Looking at my apparently flushed face, he said: "When you are yourself, come and see me in my study. You'll find me alone."

I took refuge in my own room, trying to put some sort of order into my confused thoughts. I felt that I had to fight everything that mattered, and I was stirred to the depths of my soul. I would face father immediately. . . . I entered the study . . .

I found him pacing the room with a frowning brow. Without a word, I took a seat, prepared for anything and everything.

Stopping abruptly, he asked: "Why did you wish to stay on here? What's the young girl to you?"

"I had met her already before and—was strongly attracted."

"What did you say?"

I hesitated.

"Speak up!" he cried.

His tone annoyed me, and I was lashed into saying: "I'm not a dog, but your son. If you speak to me like that, I'll not answer."

He scrutinized me silently for a while, and then said more gently: "How did you come to know her?"

"Is that of any consequence?"

"Please answer my question."

"I shall, if you promise me one thing."

"But this is sheer impertinence."

"I'm sorry, but I did not mean to be rude. I don't want some poor devil to be punished for a small mistake."

"You speak in riddles. Explain yourself."

"You promise not too visit your anger upon the man who gave me your black charger without knowing what he was doing?"

"Oh, is that it?" and he smiled. "All right, I promise."

"Thanks."

"Yes, go on; I'm listening."

"Well, one day when I was riding your horse it took me to the grove where she lives. I found the tomb, and she came in. That's how I met her."

Father suddenly went pale. Then, thinking a little, he said: "Did you meet her often?"

"Practically every day."

He paced the room agitatedly, and then, fixing me with his look, said: "And what are your feelings towards her now?"

I realised at once that father's mood was not one of anger, but of perplexity. Hope sprang up in me. Could I make him understand? Shy

and breathless, my eyes fixed on the carpet whose designs I seem to see at this moment, I cried to him: "I love her, I love her, father . . . She means everything to me in the world. Without her I should be nothing . . . Oh, father, please, please don't come between us . . . of course, I know your disappointment, for I am the son of a well-known zamindar and so supposed to be superior to her. But have I not heard you say many times that all are equal in the sight of Allah? And besides, Kismet is not a mere peasant girl: she has the manners and mien of a princess . . . Tell me father, you are not going to break my heart."

But when I looked at him, all my hopes vanished.

"You love her?" he said pityingly. "You love her!"

"Yes, very, very dearly."

"Poor fool!" he said, white as a sheet.

"Why a fool?"

"Because you are too young to think of such things. I have half a mind to give you a thrashing, and ask you to meditate on your folly." A new tone came into his voice.

"I know what I feel," I said.

"Don't be ridiculous! This farce has gone far enough."

"You may think of me what you like; but, believe me, I love her."

"Drop that silly word."

"It's the only one that expresses my meaning."

"I think you are wasting my time and yours. It cannot be."

"It cannot be! Why not? I love her. I tell you I love her."

"May be you do; but it cannot be."

"I understand. You talked bravely of everybody being equal in the sight of Allah, but at heart you are as prejudiced as any Blimp."

Father sighed.

"That's true, quite true," I cried. "You say one thing and you practise another. I shall never believe you again."

"You are very unfair, Ali. It is not because the girl is a peasant that I objected to your love for her. Oh dear no! Allah knows, she might be ten times better than you."

"Of course she is."

Father smiled sadly. "I'm quite prepared to believe you, but that's not the reason why I object to your affection for her."

"What's the reason then?"

"Alas, it cannot be."

"But why not?"

"Don't ask me. Just obey. You *cannot* love that girl."

I rose to my feet in hot resentment. "Why 'cannot'? Don't you realise that she is the only girl I care for or could care for, and that

nothing—no nothing—can prevent me from loving her?"

Father grew pale. He walked towards the window and stood looking out at the sun-drenched fields. After a while he turned and gazed at me ever so tenderly. "Listen, Ali," he said, "I'll speak to you as one man to another." There was almost a prayer in his voice. "Whose tomb did you think it was?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"She told me that of a saint."

"I'm glad she knows no better."

"Whose is it then?"

"That of her mother." Father's words were soft as a sigh.

"I thought her mother was alive and well."

"No, she is dead. The woman the girl is living with is her old nurse."

"Didn't I say that she was no common peasant? I knew that she was a noble creature. Now there is less reason than ever for our separation."

"You are still a snob," said father. "Value is independent of origin. But never mind, I repeat that you cannot love that girl."

"Why all this mystery? Why not tell me the reason?"

"It's very simple. She is my daughter."

I almost jumped up in surprise, but he stopped me with a gesture.

"Sit down and listen," he said. "Years ago, when I was a boy like you—perhaps a few years older—your grandfather brought me here to know something of our property; and then I met her. But father would not hear of it, and separated us. He was a stern, unbending man, and he thought I was making an ass of myself. He abused me roundly and sent me back home in disgrace. Soon after he returned there himself and began to talk of my settling down. Well, he persuaded me to marry a rich heiress, the daughter of a friend of his. A few months later, he died, and I had my way. But, alas, she did not live long, my Shanti. A week after Kismet came into the world she passed away. Her last words to me were: 'The child is yours; be good to her.' I loved my Shanti; I love her still; and I shall keep on loving her beyond the grave. But why talk of all this? 'The heart alone knoweth the grief thereof,' as the Christians say. To make a long story short, it was I who rode out every night. I went to commune with the beloved dead . . . Her spirit haunts the palm-grove. Men have seen a phantom shape passing between this house and the cottage in which Kismet lives. The mother is watching over her child. Woe betide the man who harms her little girl! I have seen my Shanti many times in the house

of the tomb and have spoken with her. But these details will hardly interest you. Well, you can now see the hopelessness of what you ask . . ."

His story left me staggered. "Allah, how awful!" I groaned, burying my face in my hands. What a wretch I had been! I was filled with a pitiless self-disgust.

Father approached me and laid his hand on my shoulder. "Ali," he said, with a catch in the voice, "suffering is the law of life."

But I was hardly listening. I was thinking of Kismet.

Suddenly a thought struck me, and I asked: "Does Kismet know that she is your daughter?"

"No; I thought it wiser not. I ask you, Ali, never to let her know . . ." He looked at me strangely, as though trying to read my thoughts.

"But she's a Hindu girl, isn't she?"

"What has that to do with anything? Love knows no caste or religion." Abruptly he left the room.

I sat there in agony of soul. "Poor Kismet!" I murmured again and again.

When I met father at dinner he made no reference to what had passed. He appeared more taciturn and gloomy than ever, and hardly touched the meal. As he sat there, looking beyond the Actual into the Abstract, I realised with a pang what he had gone through. Now I understood his coldness at home. An immense pity filled my soul.

"We leave this place tomorrow morning," he said, rising from the table and speaking as though he were a mere echo. "Don't attempt to see Kismet. This is *our* command."

I teased my mind with a needlepoint that night. Everything seemed to me black. I could not see a ray of light anywhere. The words of one of our poets kept ringing through my head:

*We met; we loved; and we passed on...*
*Was this, Allah, to be my fate?*

Years passed. I went to Europe. But try to forget as I would, I could not: the gentle image of Kismet was ever present with me. I saw her everywhere—in the nodding of the lilies, in the glow of the sunset, in the beauty of the midnight sky when all stars are shining. She looked at me from between the lines of the book I happened to be reading. She visited me in my dreams. She had become an environing presence.

It was impossible for me to take

to any other girl. All lacked the magic and mystery that I had found in Kismet.

Mother, who doted upon me, could not understand what had come upon me. She wondered why I turned aside any suggestion of marriage. She was sorely troubled. Sometimes, when father was with us, she spoke to him about my strange behaviour, but, to her intense chagrin, he advised her to leave me alone. Often I saw her tearful when she looked at me, but I was powerless to soothe her.

My feelings towards Kismet had gradually undergone a profound change. No longer was there a paramount physical call, but rather a deepening spiritual tie. My affection for her had become something sacred—a boon from the gods.

Father visited us every year for a short time, but he never responded to the ardent prayer in my eyes for news of Kismet. Not a word. Although he hated Karachi and in fact all big cities, he seemed to be always busy, as though anxious to finish something important. Now and again when he looked at me, it appeared that he understood my sorrow; but he said nothing to soothe my pain and heartache. Probably he thought that silence was the best remedy.

The last time he came home—it was a little before Christmas—I could scarcely recognize him; he had grown incredibly old and weary, and his eyes had a dreamy, far-away look, as though he was contemplating, not what lay around him, but some richer and newer landscape. Suddenly he became very ill. Mother was alarmed, and collected a regular regiment of doctors, but he became worse and worse. As he lay on his death-bed, fully conscious of his approaching end, he would seek my eye with a thin, ghostly smile, as much as to say: "Thank Allah, my tiresome existence will soon be over." Alone of my family I could find no tears, for I was the only one who understood. Asha, my sister, who judged everything by appearances, thought me lacking in affection but her opinion mattered little to me. She was a good girl, but no deeper than a puddle. Her emotions flared up quickly and subsided as soon. Things merely touched the shallows of her consciousness. In this she resembled mother, who loved father, but as she might love something that was *hers*. She never understood him. "He'll be waiting for us," she said with unconscious irony as we followed him to his last journey. I thought it kindest not to disturb her fond illusion.

A new aim took possession of my

life. I would, I said to myself, seek Kismet out and do what I could to assure her happiness. It was she who mattered to me. I myself did not count.

As soon as I could, I journeyed to our estate and then at once made for the palm-grove. The cottage was deserted and neglected and did not seem to have been occupied for some time. An old man, a perfect stranger to me, was placing fresh garlands on the tomb. I watched him quietly for a while, and saw that he was praying. After a time he came out, grief written on every line of his face. He was, I now noticed, a Sikh, tall, handsome, very much above a common peasant or workman.. I accosted him courteously and ventured to ask whose tomb it was.

"My wife's," he answered brokenly. "She died so many years ago. Nanak have mercy on her!"

"But Sikhs don't bury their dead," I said.

"No, they don't. But she was a lost soul. She gave up everything—husband, home, and creed—for love."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

The man came nearer and looked at me closely. "Why, you are the new master, aren't you?" he asked.

"Yes, but what's wrong with that?"

"Wrong with that!" repeated the old man with feeling. "It was your father who broke up my home . . . Don't you know the story?"

"No."

"It was your father, the great good zamindar sahib, who took away my Shanti who lies buried here." It was plain that the old man was suffering deeply. "It was barely two months after our marriage that he enticed her away," he continued. "It nearly broke my heart. If I could, I would have crushed him as you would crush a nasty insect; but my hands were tied, because she loved him . . . I had nothing to do but to go away . . . Mind, young man," he said, clutching me by the arm and transfixing me with his piercing eyes, "I bear no grudge. May be you are a better man than your father . . . Aye, aye," he cried as though defiantly, "thank Nanak, I have my child, though she knows me not as her father. Ha! he!" he laughed bitterly, almost derisively, "she fancies herself the child of Hussein! But what good to tell her the truth now? Affection grows by proximity, not by kinship. Habitual association makes a happy family of the dog, the cat and the canary; 'tis the same with us. It is enough," he went, on as though speaking to himself, "that I see her at a distance. I found her by chance

when I returned from my self-imposed exile. Kismet—what a silly name to give to a Sikh girl!—has the very sign that you see here," he said, triumphantly displaying the identical birth-mark on his arm which I had noticed on Kismet's.

I stared with joy and could almost have kissed the old man. Mastering my feelings, I said: "I'm so glad for your sake. I can do nothing to redress the wrong you have suffered, but tell me what I can do to make life easier for you and your daughter."

"I need nothing; and what's Kismet to you?" he cried harshly. Without another word, he hurried off.

I hardly noticed his departure, for he had told me all I needed. How great was my relief to know that no bar of kinship lay between Kismet and myself! I was filled with happy thoughts of her.

For a while I lingered in the grove. It was on just such a radiant day that we had last been together. In the grass the insects chirped then as now; the doves called from tree to tree; beyond the hedge flowed the same placid stream, glittering in the sunshine. Only one thing was lacking—her beloved presence. All nature seemed to be calling for her.

Unable to remain any longer among the shadows of the past, I turned my steps homewards, making a project for the future.

It did not take me long to find out where she was living. "Master," said an old peasant to me, "she's on your neighbour's estate, and is happily married."

"Married! Is she? . . . But go on; tell me more about her." Happiness, alas, was never to be my lot.

"She's quite well off. Her husband is the chief bailiff. People say that it was your good father who arranged the match and paid all the expenses."

"Ah! So he did all that?"

"Yes, master; he was a very generous man. Everyone adored him here. His death was mourned by all as if he was one of us. Peace be on his ashes! There are not many like him. You would do well to follow his example."

"Has she any children?" I asked impatiently.

"Oh, Kismet! Well, yes. She has three children. Her eldest boy is growing fast, and is a fine young man. His mother is very proud of him . . . But you should see their house; it is splendid."

I had learned enough, and dismissed the old man. "Don't tell her that you have seen me or that I have spoken to you about her," were my parting words.

The old man nodded, and pointed

to his legs. "I can't walk: they are no good to me now."

I know not whence came the urge to meet her again; I said to myself: "I must see her."

It was dusk when I rode over to my neighbour's estate and, not to attract attention, I tied the horse to a tree and went forward on foot. I soon came to a cottage standing by itself on a hillock overlooking the illimitable fields. A couple of cows were grazing nearby, fat and lazy; some dogs, questing for stray morsels around the house, barked as I came near; two pretty children the picture of health, were playing cricket, and stared at me curiously. From what I had been told it was clear that this was her home. The front door was open, and, in some trepidation, I entered.

A comely woman was bending over a manger, busily stirring the contents with her hands. Her arms were bare to the elbow and the cloth had slipped from her head. On hearing my approach, she looked up, hastily covering her head, and looked at me inquiringly.

"So very sorry to disturb you," I said, "but perhaps you can help me."

"I don't understand."

"I'll try to explain."

"Very well. Come into the other room." She began to wipe her hands on her dress.

It was she—she—my Kismet! The passing years had wrought their changes, but the delicate features were still traceable. And I could not mistake those large dark eyes, though the innocent wonder they had once expressed had given place to the placid outlook of maturer years. Would she know me again? I thought as I took the seat she offered me. But she stood there, calm and collected, waiting for me to speak.

"Have you been long in these parts?" I began lamely.

"More than nineteen years—ever since I was married."

"I suppose your husband works on this estate?"

"He's the head bailiff," she said proudly. "Our master looks to him for everything—so he's a very busy man indeed. But it's almost time he was back . . . Forgive me," she cried, as though suddenly recollecting something important, "I must look into the kitchen for a moment." With that she left me.

I was waiting for her to reappear, my mind imagining the Kismet of the past, then so near, now so remote.

She returned. "My man needs a good meal after working all day, and so does my big boy," she explained. There was pride in her

voice as she uttered the word "boy".

"Thank Allah, she's happy!" I murmured inwardly. Then aloud I said: "I hope your man is good to you?"

"Isn't he?" and she laughed. "Of course he is. There is no one like him. Look, what he has given me!" and she displayed her arms, almost covered with silver bangles.

I thought of the little Kismet who had once shown me her gold locket, and instinctively my glance went to her neck. There it was, still suspended from its slender chain.

"Is that also from your husband?" I pointed to the locket.

"No, no, that's from the old master—a kind man who did a lot for me. Allah rest his soul!"

"Did you know his son who is now the head of the family?" I asked in as indifferent a voice as I could assume.

Her face clouded; and when at last she spoke there was something like resentment in her voice. "I did not know him," she said, "but a friend of mine did. He professed to be fond of her, but left her without a word. How the poor thing suffered! Some of you seem to think that we have no feelings. What blindness! But thank Allah, she has learnt to forget him. Please don't talk of him; he was not a real man like his father. We now look upon him as dead . . ." There was no mistaking the sincerity in her voice.

I rose to depart.

Just then a young man came striding into the room.

"That's my big boy," she said proudly.

Was I dreaming? He was the image of myself at the same age. There was no room for doubt: he was my own son.

They made no effort to detain me. I was an utter stranger to both.

I bade them a courteous farewell and departed. The shadows of night were gathering fast, and I rode away with a deeper shadow in my heart.

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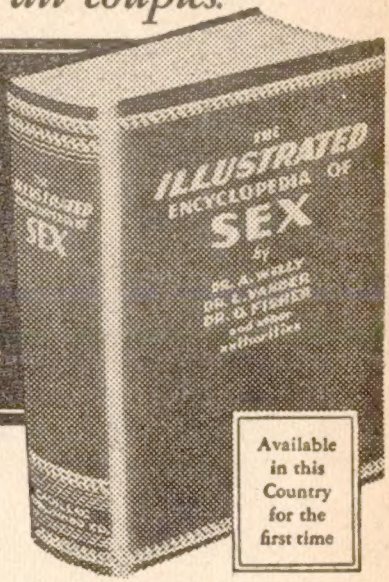


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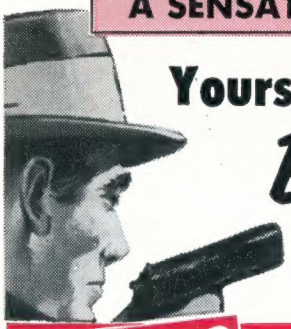

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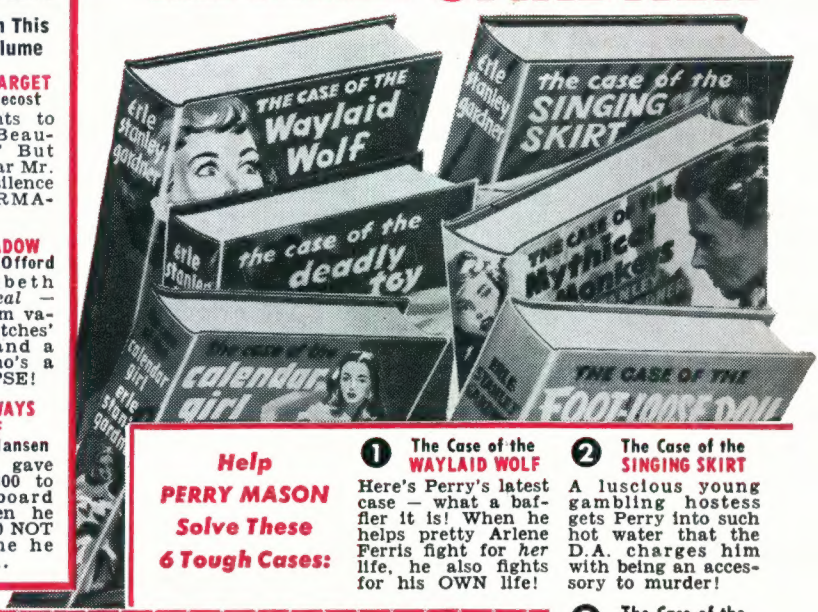
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